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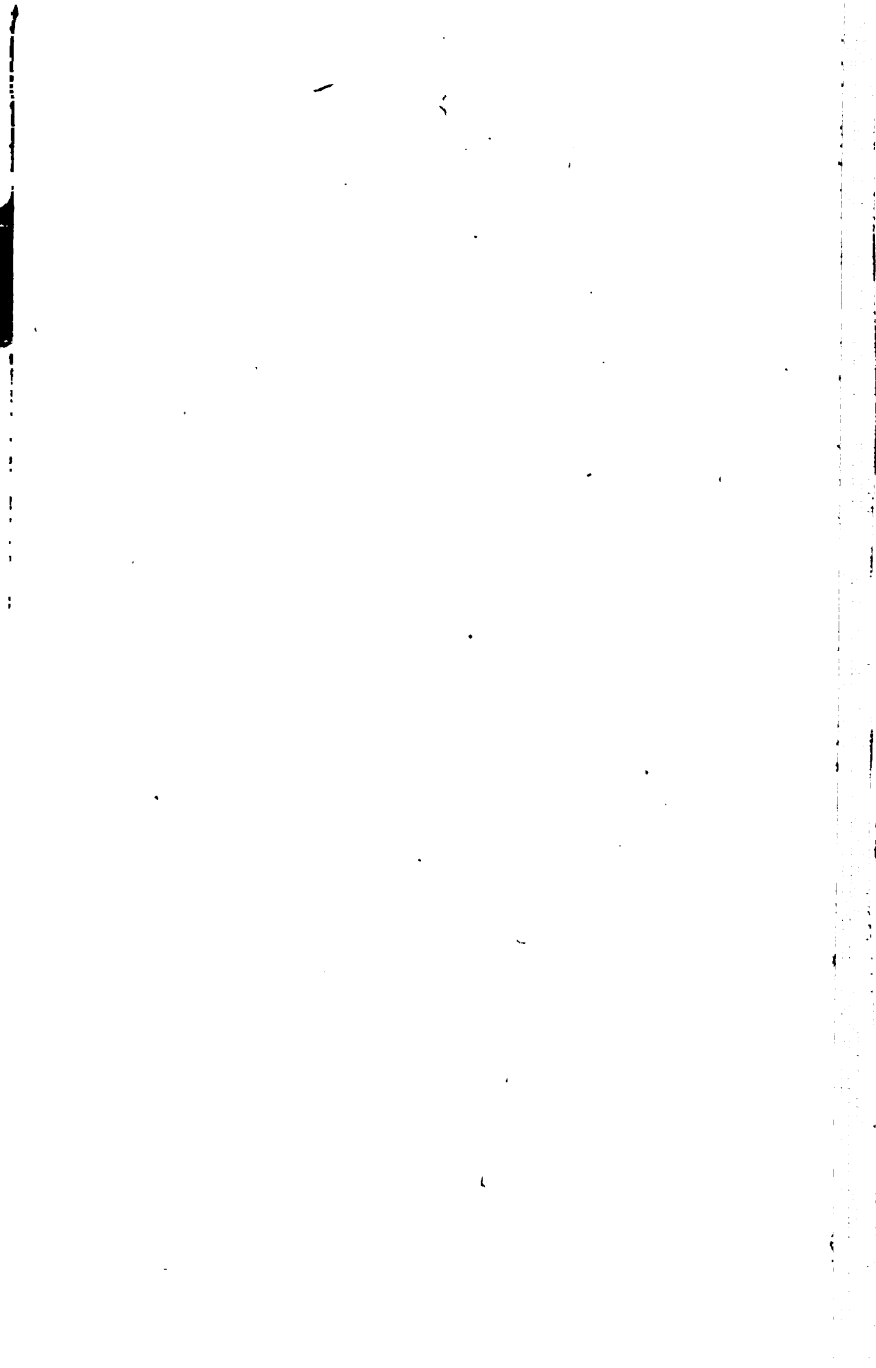


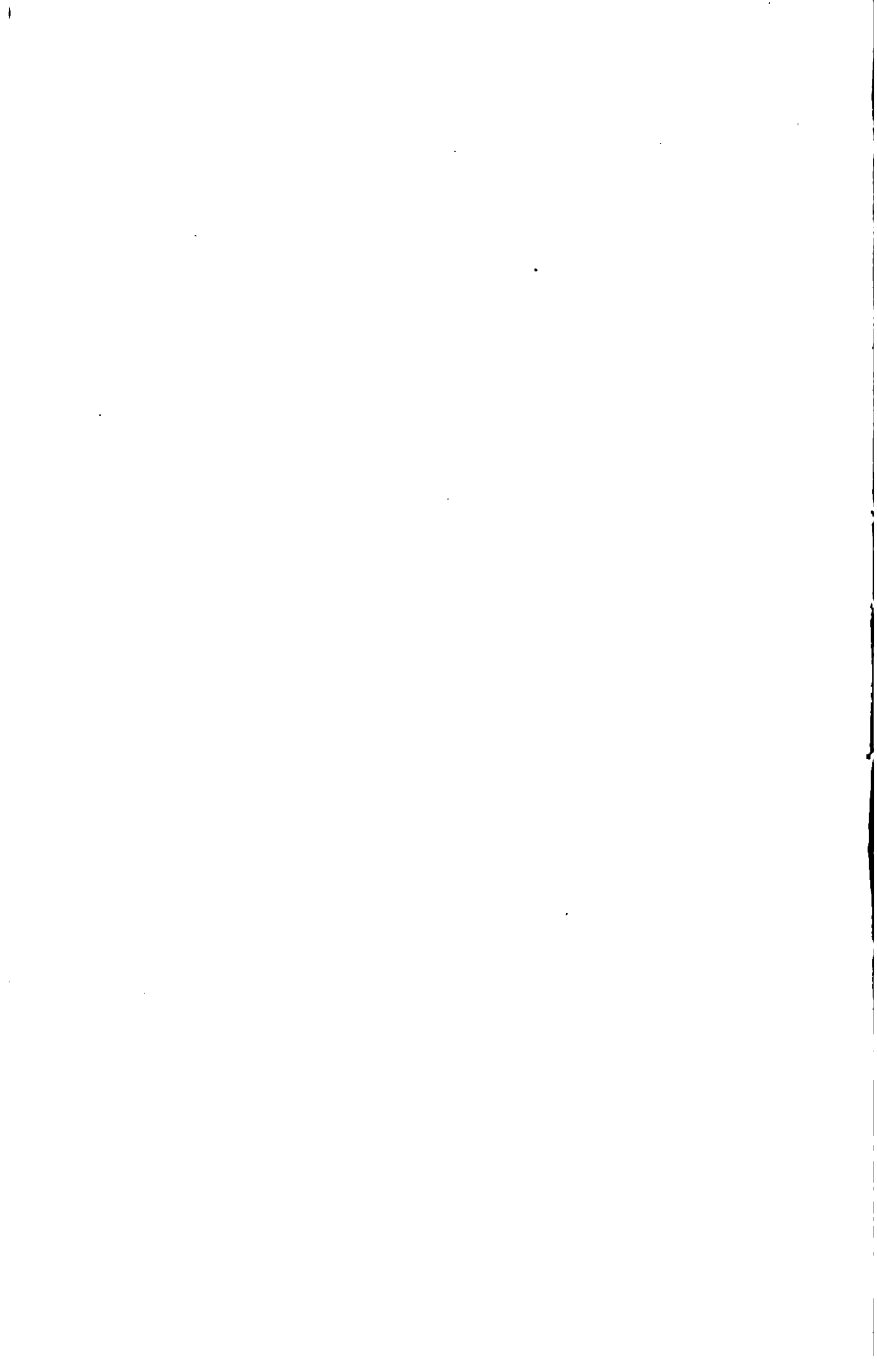
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THE GARDEN OF SWORDS

By the Same Author

KRONSTADT.

A PURITAN'S WIFE.

THE IMPREGNABLE CITY.

THE SEA WOLVES.

THE IRON PIRATE.

THE LITTLE HUGUENOT.

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Stanley L. Wood '98

“Into the death-pit Lefort rode.”

THE
GARDEN OF SWORDS

BY

MAX PEMBERTON

Author of

"KRONSTADT," "THE IRON PIRATE," "THE LITTLE HUGUENOT,"
"A PURITAN'S WIFE," ETC., ETC.



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*Sickle and reaper and harvest of sorrow ;
Heavy the wagons that gather the dead ;
Let there be dirge for the sun of the morrow !
God is the gleaner on fields ye have fled !*



CONTENTS

Book I

MAN AND WIFE

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. PÈRE BONOT READS THE "COURRIER" . . .	1
II. AT THE PLACE KLEBER	10
III. "A LOOMING BASTION"	25
IV. AT THE CHÂLET OF THE NIEDERWALD . . .	33
V. THE HERALD OF THE STORM	49
VI. THE LAST DAY OF JULY	56
VII. "THOSE OTHERS"	67
VIII. OVER THE HEARTS OF FRANCE	83
IX. THE FUGITIVE	90
X. WAITING	102
XI. THE HUSSARS ARE AT GUNSTETT	108

Book II

BATTLE

XII. THE BLOOD-RED DAY OF WÖRTH	115
XIII. THE DEATH RIDE	131
XIV. NIGHT	148
XV. A BIVOUAC OF DRAGOONS	162
XVI. THE PROMISE	166
XVII. THE CITY OF THE GOLDEN MISTS . . .	176

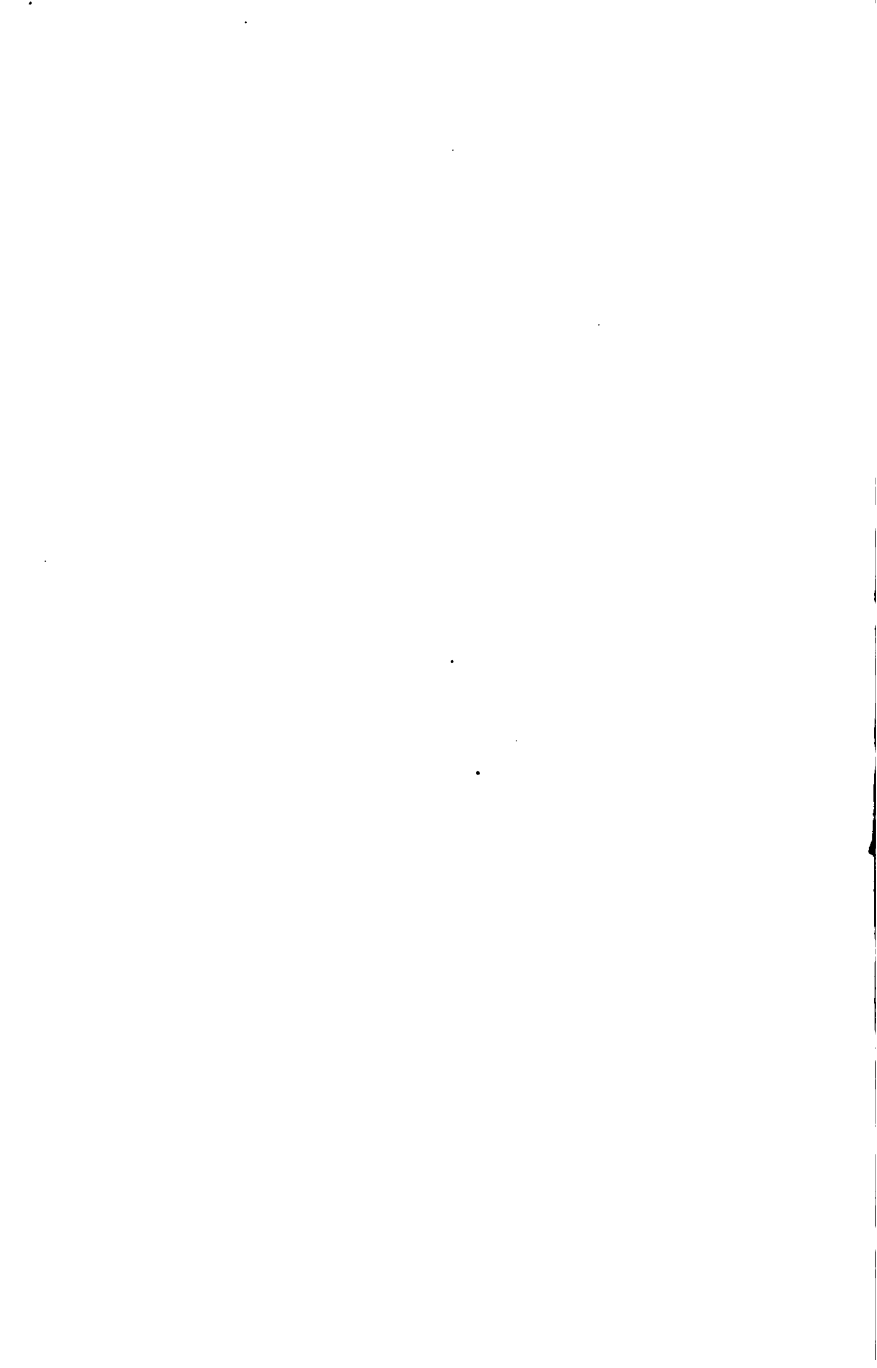
Book III

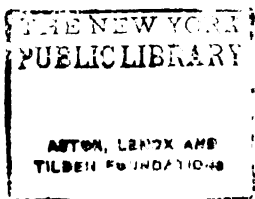
THE SIEGE

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. THE FIRST DAYS	191
XIX. A FACE AT THE WINDOW	201
XX. THE BEGINNING OF THE TERROR	211
XXI. THE RUE DE L'ARC-EN-CIEL	220
XXII. "LA PAUVRE"	239
XXIII. THE NIGHT OF TRUCE	248
XXIV. AN ULTIMATUM	260
XXV. CONFESSION	268
XXVI. THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW	274
XXVII. ACCUSATION	287
XXVIII. "IF STRASBURG FALLS"	297
XXIX. THE LETTER	307
XXX. IN THE HOUSE OF LAROCHE	313
XXXI. "THERE IS NIGHT IN THE HILLS"	324

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
“ Into the death-pit Lefort rode ” . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“ Vouchsafed such particulars of the wedding as he found to be good ” . . .	<i>Facing page 1</i>
“ The Lancers put their horses to a brisk trot ”	” ” 24
“ There were many soldiers in the café ” .	” ” 26
“ ‘ To the news from Paris ! ’ he cried ” .	” ” 30
“ Turned her head to see a little old man on a great grey horse ”	” ” 68
“ Fired wildly on the stooping figure before him ”	” ” 81
“ He came at sunset, galloping up the high road ”	” ” 89
“ ‘ The Prussians are in the town ! ’ ” . .	” ” 114
“ Sitting there . . . with that old fire-eater Captain Quirat by his side ” . . .	” ” 140
“ The Turcos fell in heaps before the harbour ”	” ” 150
“ Here the story of the flight was to be read ”	” ” 179
“ She shrank back terrified into the porch ”	” ” 226
“ The Frenchman . . . reeled back across the table ”	” ” 267
“ Savage men brandishing knives and swords ”	” ” 286
“ She stood white-faced and mute against the wall ”	” ” 296







“ Vouchsafed such particulars of the wedding as he
found to be good.”

The Garden of Swords

BOOK I

Man and Wife

CHAPTER I

PÈRE BONOT READS THE "COURRIER"

OLD Père Bonot, sunning himself before the doors of a café by the minster, held the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin* in his hand, and vouchsafed to Rosenbad, the brewer, and to Hummel, the vintner, such particulars of the forthcoming wedding as he found to be good. A glass of coffee stood at Père Bonot's elbow; his blue spectacles rested high upon a forehead where no wrinkles sat; the smoke from his cigarette hung in little white clouds about his iron-grey hair. He sat before the great cathedral of Strasburg; but the paper and its words carried him away to a little village of the mountains where, forty years ago, he had knelt at the altar with Henriette at his side, and an old priest had blessed him, and he had gone out to the sunny vineyards, hand in hand with

2 The Garden of Swords

his girl-wife to their home in a forest of the Vosges. There were tears in old Bonot's eyes when he took up the *Courrier* again.

"Nevertheless, my friends," said he, covering his retreat with a great show of folding the paper and setting his glasses, "nevertheless — her mother was a Frenchwoman! Marry the devil to a good girl — and, as the saying goes, there is no more devil. I remember Marie Douay — twenty, twenty-two years ago. I saw her at Görsdorf with Madame Hélène, a little brunette, always gay, always laughing; a bird to cage in Paris; a bird of the gardens and not of the mountains. When she married the Englishman, milord Hamilton, who had lived for two years in the Broglie here, was it for me to be surprised? *Nom d'un gail-lard*, I was not surprised at all. The eagle to the mountains, the gold-breast to the cage. Certainly we were too sleepy for Marie Douay. She went to London with milord — *et après* —"

He slapped the paper as though all were settled; but Rosenbad, the fat German brewer, took his pipe from his mouth and chuckled with a deep guttural note.

"The *après* was Mademoiselle Beatrix — hein?" said he. "There were no more *après's*, friend Bonot? That is for by-and-by — when the priest *là-bas* is forgotten."

Père Bonot reads the "Courrier" 3

Old Hummel, the vintner, shook his head.

"These things bring the white hairs," he exclaimed dolefully; "when you are sixty you should not go to weddings or to funerals. I have seven children, and the priests are always in my house. Next week, the Abbé Colot baptises my tenth grandchild. When I see a lad at the altar I say to myself, 'By-and-by he will drink his beer at the Stadt Paris, and will be in no hurry to go home again.' I do not wish to look through the window while another man dances. If I cannot dance myself, I will sit here and forget the days when I could. Ah—that it should be so many years ago!"

He struck a mournful note, a discord upon that sunny morning of July when there was a sky of azure above the minster spire of Strasburg, and some of the glory of summer hovered even in the well of her narrow streets. Old Père Bonot, called back again in thought to the village of the mountains, closed his eyes and listened to the musical bells pealing now in many a tower and steeple. By here and there, groups of well-dressed citizens crossed the open space before the western door of the vast church and passed from the sunshine to the soft lights of green, of red, of gold, of purple, which fell upon the pavements of the dim, mysterious aisles.

4 The Garden of Swords

Ever and anon, a carriage clattered over the flags, and men in gaudy uniforms, the white and silver of the cuirassiers, the green of the Empress's dragoons, the blue of the lancers, added their gilt of colour to the swelling throngs. It was a soldier's wedding, Strasburg said, and you must search many a city of Europe before you would find as pretty a bride as the stately English girl who went to the altar that morning, or a better lancer than Edmond Lefort, who was to take Beatrix Hamilton to the mountains presently.

The bells rang in the steeples; the people gathered in the minster square and at the great western doors of the cathedral. Many were peasants, clattering in their sabots, peasants come down from the vineyards to witness the marriage of the grandchild of one whom they and their fathers before them had held in honour—that servant of charity and of love, Hélène, Countess of Görsdorf. Flowers they carried to scatter upon the path which the mistress of their affections must tread; and those that had no flowers gave laughter and merry tongues, and it may even be a prayer, for the English girl who was Strasburg's bride that day. And side by side with them were the louts of the hills, the *vignerons*, the *moissonneurs*, men of field and

Père Bonot reads the "Courrier" 5

farm and orchard, red-cheeked all, with spotless blouses, and many a *bon mot*, and many a whisper of other marriages that might be when the harvesting was done. Such a crowd had not gathered at the church doors for twenty years, the people said. But then—it was Madame Hélène's grandchild.

Old Père Bonot watched the people, and the smile came back to his contented face.

"It is forty years ago," he said, "forty to a day, *ma foi*. The seventh of July—"

"Come, then—" interrupted Hummel, the melancholy vintner, "many things will happen to us before the seventh of July, *mon vieux*. The day is Tuesday, and Sunday was the third. It would be the fifth if I can add three and two."

Old Bonot assented grudgingly.

"I married Henriette at Reichshoffen on the seventh day of July in the year 1830. To-day is the fifth then, and the year is 1870. It was on the twenty-fifth day of the month that Charles the Tenth signed the five ordinances which cost him his throne. On the next day *le roi Guillaume* came to the throne of England. Ah, *mes enfants*, the things that forty years can teach us, the joys we can forget, the griefs we can suffer. And there is always death—always, always—"

6 The Garden of Swords

He was thinking of little Henriette and the place where she slept in the green valley of Reichshoffen; but Rosenbad, the merry brewer, was all eyes for the wedding and the great throngs then crossing the square.

“Oh! but you are gay this morning, old Bonot,” said he. “I shall go and tell them that there is a skeleton for their feast—the man in black who says that the bell can toll sometimes. Is not he a proper fellow to make their wine sour! And he has children of his own!”

The vintner took up his long glass of Munich beer, and chimed in with his old complaint.

“I will be as gay as ten grandchildren will let me—for the sake of the little English girl. Afterwards I must go home. Père Bonot shall call for some more beer and remember that we are Germans —”

He spoke jestingly, but the Frenchman was up in arms in a moment.

“Not so,” he cried fiercely. “I am the servant of my Emperor, and of no other. As for your beer, it is the drink of louts. I give it to my pigs. When the King of Prussia is crowned in the minster—I will drink your beer on that day.”

He hammered upon the table with a blow which shook the glasses and brought a waiter

Père Bonot reads the "Courrier" 7

hurrying to the place. But while his anger was still young, a great sound of cheering broke upon their ears, and all in the café stood up to see a great family coach, drawn by a pair of staid grey horses, roll in leisured dignity across the square. Within the coach there sat an old lady with hair as white as silver, and hollowed cheeks and kindly blue eyes, and such a nobility of manner and unassumed graciousness, that all the gentlest gifts of motherhood seemed united in her.

"Wait — wait! there is the Countess herself with Mademoiselle Beatrix by her side. *Sac à papier!* — he is lucky, the lancer. I would even forget that I have seven —"

"She has no eyes for winter, friend Hummel. They say that the English are an ugly nation, but, *ma foi*, there is one to give them the lie. And the lancer — there will be no King of Prussia in Strasbourg while we have men like that. *Mon Dieu* — what shoulders!"

A tremendous cheer greeted the three occupants of the old-world coach. Hélène, Countess of Görsdorf, leant back upon the cushions of yellow satin, and there were tears of gladness in her eyes. Mademoiselle Beatrix, as the people called the English girl, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but timidly into the eyes of the young officer of lancers who sat before her, and whose blue

8 The Garden of Swords

uniform and scarlet breeches were a feast of colour in the gloom of the cathedral square. All that the peasants said of her was admitted readily by maturer critics. A brunette, she had nevertheless the blue eyes of the Saxon. Possessed of no particular features that made for any style of beauty, yet there was a winning sweetness of face and of expression which communicated itself instantly, and was not to be resisted. And she was Madame Hélène's grandchild! Strasburg asked no more even from the wife of one of the best of her soldiers.

The carriage rolled by; the sun shone generously upon the glittering habiliments of the lancer, and upon the childish face of his English wife. Madame Hélène's white hairs were as threads of silver. In the morning light, the tears upon her cheek sparkled as drops of golden dew. They were going to leave her alone at last—those children of hers; alone in the great house, the home she had loved; in the city of her girlhood and the beloved sanctuary of maternity. She said that God had willed it so; and there was a prayer in her heart that the years of her loneliness might be few.

Old Père Bonot, standing at the very edge of the causeway, raised his hat as the carriage passed, and when he cried "God bless them!" it may be

Père Bonot reads the "Courrier" 9

that Madame Hélène's prayer was echoed unconsciously by him, and that he thought of a distant valley in the mountains, and of one who slept there, and of the precious years, so quick to pass, when the first and last words of his happy days had been spoken by the child-wife who had loved him.

"Henriette — Henriette — I remember always!"

So does Death ride upon the coach of Life — and so, in that sunny city of Strasburg, where the bells rang a merry note, and the people feasted, and the old cathedral trembled to the swelling notes of its mighty organ, were there those who thought of the aftermath of years and of the hands for ever still. And this thought they remembered at a later day, so soon to come, when the thunder of the guns made music for their ears, and the priests who had lifted their hands to bless the living went out to the homes of the dying and the dead.

CHAPTER II

AT THE PLACE KLEBER

THERE had been a vast throng at the cathedral, but when the service was done, and the organist had played Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" as a tribute to the English bride, and the congregation streamed again through the great western doors, only the very privileged and those who claimed some kinship with Madame Hélène were invited to her great house on the Place Kleber.

"It is a family wedding," the old lady had said. "I have known Edmond so long that he is as my own son. Beatrix is more than a daughter to me. I do not want the whole world to see my tears. We will be alone my children — and I — when that 'good-bye' is said."

Such was her resolution, but the heart prevailing over the will, many persuaded her and claimed kinship with the house of Görsdorf; and there were others, portly canons from the minster, sleek presbyters from the Lutheran churches, officers of the garrison, the mayor of the city — even the governor, the great General Uhrich himself, with his splendid cocked hat and his dainty

“imperial,” and his glory in the city of Strasburg and her wondrous past. All these came to felicitate the young people; all remembered that it was a soldier’s wedding. The people declared that an army had gone to the Place Kleber. Lancers in their light blue tunics, with a word of regret for the *kurtkas* they had lost last year; hussars, whose spurs clattered over the splendid parquet flooring of the *salon*; cuirassiers, whose breastplates shone as silver; officers of Turcos fresh from Africa; gunners, engineers — a very deputation from that glorious army of France in which, Beatrix said, in her own pretty way, she had now a place. Henceforth, all that concerned the army of France must be dear to her. For France had given her Edmond — and she was his wife.

The day had been as a day of dreams to her. Now that it was nearly done, and she stood at *grandmère* Hélène’s side in the great room of the old house, she had but few memories of all its momentous happenings. She knew not why — but yesterday seemed as a day of remote years. She could recollect waking that morning and hearing the voice of old Hélène, who kissed her many times, and seemed already to be saying “good-bye.” She remembered her clumsiness when she had put on her splendid dress, and the *coiffeur* had come to weave the sprays of blossom into her

12 The Garden of Swords

rebellious hair; how her hands had trembled when she had clasped the diamond bracelet which was Edmond's gift to her! And afterwards — what a whirl of sights and sounds and of familiar faces! "Felicitations!" All the city, surely, had come to the Place Kleber with that word on its lips.

Men and women, friends and strangers, they had striven one with another to be the first in kindnesses to Strasburg's guest, the daughter of Madame Hélène's daughter, the wife of one of the best of their soldiers. She asked herself if this was not, in one moment, the compensation for a girlhood which had earned many compensations; for a destiny which had bequeathed to her but a fitful memory of her father's face, and had left her motherless when first she had learned to read the book of life through her mother's eyes. What a pride of happiness that the bells should ring and the city should feast for her sake! She was no longer alone in the world, then. Ever the words "wife, you are his wife" echoed in her ears above the buzz of talk and the noises of the street without. Some change, indefinite, exquisite, seemed wrought within her mind. She heard no other voice but this — the voice of her heart telling her that the years of girlhood were for ever passed. She saw the future as through a mist of glad tears. The figures about her were shadowy figures mov-

ing, as it were, in some room of her dreams. Friends held her hand and spoke to her of the great ceremony in the cathedral. She answered them; yet knew not what she said. They called her "Madame Lefort." How odd it seemed! "Madame, Madame!" She was Beatrix Hamilton no more. The hour had placed a great gulf between her and the old time. She did not mourn her girlhood nor regret it.

Notwithstanding Madame Hélène's scruples, it was a brilliant gathering. All Strasburg bore witness to that. The city made the success of it an affair of its own, and sent a guard of honour to the Place Kleber, and the lancers' band to play all the afternoon before the great house. Abbés and canons, generals and colonels raised their glasses and nodded their heads to the rhythm of the music. Sleeker Lutherans found dark corners wherein they could anticipate hunger without observation. Social leaders scanned the bride's dress through critical glasses, and admitted that it was *très bien*.

"Her father was an English artist, hein? She has ideas, and they will help her by-and-by. If she were not so tall! — how can one be anything but *gauche* with a figure like that? And she wants style; certainly, she has a pretty gown, and that is something."

14 The Garden of Swords

The old lady who spoke, a wizened dame, who had buried two husbands, raised her pincenez and appealed for assent to a fat abbé who held a glass of sparkling wine in his hand. But the abbé answered her with a perpetual smile, and a voice which repeated again and again —

“ Ah, how pretty she is — how pretty ! ”

Other men took up her cause and pleaded it with courage.

Women assented grudgingly, and gathered together in shaded alcoves to remind each other of the mystery which had attended the life of her father, Sir Richard Hamilton. He had been a monster, as tradition said ; yet few knew more or could add to the scant particulars which served for gossip in the salons of the city. They loved the suggestion of a scandal — as all the world loves it — these jewelled crones of Strasburg, and they feasted upon it and found it to be good, and sought therein a recompense for a beauty they could but half deny, and for a charm to which they would not submit.

Beatrix herself, standing by her husband's side, heard none of these words. When she could forget the past and the future, and remember where she was and what the day meant to her, it was a pleasure to see how many of her friends

had come to the old house on the Place Kleber. Colot, the aged abbé, who loved her as a father; the merry General de Faily, who had sworn to make a little Frenchwoman of her; pretty gossiping little Thérèse Lavencourt, who had schemed so incessantly to bring Edmond to Strasburg; Georgine, the friend of her girlhood, who thought so often of the young Englishman, Brandon North. Where was Brandon now, she asked? She saw him alone near the long windows of the balcony. Why was he not at Georgine's side? He had been a year in Strasburg and yet had found no eyes to see how pretty Georgine was. That must be her business by-and-by when she had a house of her own, Beatrix thought. She realised her friendship for one of her own countrymen in that hour. Great as was the kindness which these people of Strasburg showed her, nevertheless she was a stranger among them. The fifteen years of her life she had spent in England had made her an Englishwoman beyond hope of change. She loved French things, yet did not love her own country the less because of them.

She beckoned Brandon to her side, and he came with reluctant steps. His strange and truly English dislike of any self-assertion had followed him to Madame Hélène's house. Silently,

16 The Garden of Swords

in a corner by the window, he had listened to the parrot-like chatter of the women and the silly persiflage which passed among the men for the wit of Paris. When Beatrix beckoned him, he set down his cup and crossed the room slowly. He was one of the few there who wore a plain black coat and had no wealth of star and ribbon to apologise for a tongue but ill-equipped. He came and stood by her, with his fair hair tumbled upon his forehead and his hands ill at ease, and a strange, almost sardonic smile about his lips.

“Well,” she said, and her splendid dress rustled as she spoke, “are *you* the only one —”

He held her hand a moment in his. An odour of flowers and rare scents hovered about the place. He did not look into her eyes, but knew that hers were upon him.

“The only one in a black coat — yes; that’s my qualification, Madame Lefort.”

“Madame Lefort.” How odd it sounded! Yesterday he would have called her Mademoiselle Beatrix as the others did. He was one of her few friends. She would not have been cross if he had said “Beatrix,” as sometimes he had done when they went picknicking to the woods above Görsdorf.

“You do not congratulate me,” she said, with-

drawing her hand quickly. "I don't believe you were at the church."

He turned and plucked a blossom of white rose from a vase. The petals were crumpled in his hand and scattered upon the carpet while he answered her.

"Of course I congratulate you," he said slowly, "if the congratulations of a man in a frock coat are worth anything. There are so many important persons in colours here that you must excuse me if I have my doubts." And then he asked suddenly, "What made you think that I was not at the church?"

She nodded her head to a fierce Turco on the other side of the room, and then said, as if it were a thing of no importance —

"I did not see you there."

He continued to crumple the rose leaves.

"I was hidden by the splendour of Thérèse Lavencourt and of Colonel Poittevin. She spent her time saying her prayers and in begging him to stand upon a chair and tell her the names of the generals in the choir. I have learnt half the scandals of Strasburg this morning, and I shall learn the other half to-night when she dances with me. You know that she is giving a ball?"

"She was just telling me so. She calls it in

18 The Garden of Swords

my honour. As I shall not be there, that is very good of her. And I am to dance in spirit — as if one could do that. But, of course, she is awfully kind.”

“To herself, undoubtedly. She will dance into heaven some day and set the angels by the ears. How glorious to die to Strauss’s music with a dim suggestion of stairs and a conservatory — and, of course, a partner waiting. But these things do not interest you — now. You will be at the Niederwald while I am dressing.”

She shook hands with old General Uhrich, who was going back to the citadel, before she answered him.

“Oh, yes, we are going to Görsdorf, of course, but not to the castle. You remember our picnic there, when we had dinner in a vault? Some day Edmond will rebuild the house. We shall stay at the *châlet* for some time, and afterwards we go on to Metz. I think that I should like that. There is always something eerie about a place which you can’t get into and can’t get out of.”

“A description applying to a prison, I imagine.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“When one is in France one must think as France does. I am proud of Metz already; and,

of course, a soldier's wife should interest herself in the things that interest him."

"Especially when the marching orders carry him to the Rue de la Paix."

She laughed brightly.

"We are going to Paris in January," she said. "It will be Mecca to me. Imagine it, five years in France, and only one week to try on hats at Aines. I tell Edmond that I am not civilised. He owes it to himself to start an establishment on the Boulevard St. Germain and a box at the opera. Either that or a finishing school somewhere near the Bois. We could spend our holidays together — when he comes home from the wars."

A shadow crossed the man's face. He looked down upon her for a moment and saw an exquisite vision of lace and flowers and satin, and dark eyes full of laughter, and cheeks flushed with excitement, and a little hand upon which a circle of diamonds glittered, and another ring of plain gold. Never in his life before had he understood why men could die for women; but he thought that he understood it in that instant.

"You have taken the wars into consideration, then?" he said.

She turned to him with a strange look of fear and wonder.

20 The Garden of Swords

“The wars — what wars?”

He passed it off with a jest.

“The social wars, of course; there could be no others.”

She had ceased to laugh, and was looking round the room for her husband.

“As if there could be,” she said determinedly. “Ask General de Failly. He says that we have only to whisper and all Europe will obey. How could there be any wars!”

It was perverse of such an old friend as Brandon — and so like him — to speak of such a thing at such a time. The argument, nevertheless, fascinated her strangely, and she would have continued it had not her husband come up while the words were still upon her lips. He was there to tell her that the train for Wörth left at half-past four.

“Ah, *mon vieux*,” he said gaily to Brandon, “I thought that you had deserted us to-day. Were you in the church, then?”

“I have just told Madame so.”

“And you heard her answer the bishop? They all heard it, Beatrix. And the General has sent an escort of lancers. They are on the Place now, waiting. We must not keep them nor Guillaumette at the other end.”

He spoke quickly and with unsuppressed excite-

ment, and in his look there was that deep and unquestioning affection which marriage may wring for a day even from the worst of men. Dressed still in his brilliant blue uniform, with a shining czapska in his hand and his sword trailing upon the polished floor of wood, Beatrix thought that in all France there was no man worthy to stand by his side. Even the touch of his hand could make her tremble. She looked into his eyes and believed to read therein the whole story of his love for her. And she was his wife—his wife.

“I am ready, dearest,” she said. “I will go and change now — and you?”

“I shall want five minutes,” he said gaily; “after that the triumphal procession sets out.”

She left the room, unobserved. The men turned to the buffet.

“Shall we see you this winter here?” Lefort asked, while a sergeant filled him a glass of champagne.

Brandon answered evasively.

“I have no plans. I let the weather make them for me. If it is cold at Frankfort, you may hear of me in Nice. But you — you go to Paris, of course.”

Lefort nodded his head.

“There will be the manoeuvres first, and after

22 The Garden of Swords

that the other manœuvres — at the bonnet shops. I am hoping that we shall be at Châlons next year. There are too many Germans in Strasburg, you see — and then, change is good for a bride. Beatrix is a stranger, and too much Vosges — but you do not drink. I am as thirsty as a trooper out of Baden. And to-morrow I shall wear a grey coat. *Sac à papier*, that will make me look like a German band.”

He laughed as a boy at the idea, and pledged the other in a second glass of wine.

“To your health, my friend.”

Brandon, outwardly the same unimpressionable, stolid fellow that they had always known him, just touched the rim of the upraised glass with his own, but he did not say “*à ta santé*” in his turn. His thoughts had already left the Place Kleber. He was thinking of that old thatched farmhouse in the Vosges mountains to which the man at his side was about to take Beatrix Hamilton. What freak of destiny brought such a day? He did not realise it even then. Beatrix married! The words echoed in his ears as a peal of ribald laughter. He turned from the buffet and went to stand upon the balcony, and to look down upon the escort of lancers gathered in the square below. The brilliant blue of their uniforms, the scarlet plumes of the *czapskas*, the pennants of the lances,

the music of bands; the glitter, the colour, the whirl of it all were truly French. Yet this bizarre display was for her sake, for the sake of little Beatrix — for the sake of her who yesterday was free. How distant the day seemed! It had become of the past, irrevocable now. He would never live yesterday again. The page was written and the book was closed.

He did not enter the great *salon* again nor add himself to the number of those who surrounded the bride at the moment of farewell. When *grandmère* Hélène took Beatrix in her arms, he heard the words she spoke, and they seemed an echo of his own thoughts.

“The days will be so long, so weary, my dearest girl,” she cried again and again, while the tears of love fell fast; but to Lefort she said, “I am giving you myself — my child! God bless you, Edmond.”

Brandon heard the words, yet did not move from his place upon the balcony. Others came out to stand with him, and saw that the strange, half-cynical smile was still upon his lips. In the great square the people began to cheer, the trumpets to blare again. He beheld an old family coach drawn up before the house. He watched the excited guests who remembered vague traditions of English weddings and scattered rice and

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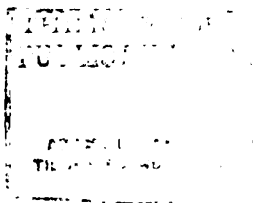
24 The Garden of Swords

flowers upon the English bride. For a long instant he saw Beatrix herself looking straight up at him. Then the carriage rolled away to the station; the lancers put their horses to a brisk trot. He heard no sound but that of weeping. The Countess was alone in the deserted *salon*.

But Beatrix, with her husband's hand held fast by hers, was asking herself why Brandon North had been the only one who had not said "good-bye" to her.



“The Lancers put their horses to a brisk trot.”



CHAPTER III

“ A LOOMING BASTION ”

BRANDON dined in his little room above the office near the Porte des Pierres; and when dusk fell he set out to walk to the Contades and to his favourite café there. The ball which Thérèse Lavencourt was to give had no longer an interest for him. He sought to be alone and to forget the day.

It was almost dusk when he reached the park, and he remembered, in spite of himself, that Beatrix would be already in the farmhouse on the hills above the Sauer. He had not wished to think of it, and had gone to the gardens that friends might help him to forget; but when a waiter had served him with coffee and he had read the papers from Paris, it seemed to him that a greater sense of solitude possessed him than he had ever known since he left Cambridge and came, at his father's wish, to help his father's business in Strasburg. One day had changed his view of life. While she was in the city, he could forget the reasons that kept him to a

26 The Garden of Swords

merchant's desk and had expatriated him. He could forget the years of public-school life in the England he had left. He could forget his own ambitions buried in those vast and dusty cellars of Frankfort wherefrom his father, William North, sent the Rhine wine to the courts of Europe. But Beatrix was in Strasburg no more. He would not have believed yesterday that there was such a lonely place in all the world.

There were many soldiers in the café — lancers and artillerymen, Turcos and zouaves. A band played, with rare intervals of silence, and its flippant music was an irritant to his ear. He heard pretty women chattering nonsense to officers of cavalry whose wit reached no higher point than assent incoherent. He beheld slipshod and rolling troopers, and remembered the hussars in Germany, and the strong hand which built there a house of steel for a nation's safety. In such a moment as this he would almost forgive his father because he had wished to make a German of him. It was no glorious employment to sell so many bottles of wine per annum; no glorious employment, it is true, for a man who had written decent Greek prose, and had spoken of immortal things at the Union. He would have preferred a commission in a cavalry regiment at home; or, better still, that liberty which ties a man neither to city nor to



Illustration by J. G. S. G.

“ There were many soldiers in the cafe.”

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“A Looming Bastion” 27

country, but sends him to see and hear on the wide road of the world. But his father had other views. “The stool that I sat on should not be too high for my son,” he said; and Brandon took it, and found his consolation elsewhere.

He was the friend of Germany as much of necessity as of admiration. The French, as a people, fascinated him, yet won no allegiance from him. His own gifts of strength of will and purpose, of method, of physical capability, were just such gifts as he found wanting in all the Frenchmen he knew. The power to achieve by thought and years, that power which was the very heart of Germany, engrossed him always. He saw these men of Strasburg, and he knew that if ever the day should come when the hosts of Germany crossed the Rhine, not only a city but an empire and a kingdom would fall. There were moments even when the sordid nature of his own business made him reflect that war would not only change the current of his life in a day, but would open up for him those scenes of humanity militant which had been the study of his imagination in many a lonely hour. But war now — now that Beatrix had gone to the Görsdorf!

He laughed at himself for thinking of it, and turned again to watch the unshapely troopers

28 The Garden of Swords

who slouched before the door of the café, and stood for all the glory of the glorious army of France. What would war mean to such men as these? Scorn of their deficiencies became almost anger sometimes. He had the impulse to get up and drill them — to straighten them with the flat of a sword he must borrow.

There was no one in the café that he knew; but when he had been there a little while old Père Bonot, the cigar merchant, and with him Rosenbad, the brewer, came up to his table, and insisted, as was their wont, upon speaking of the one event which Strasburg recognised that day. He listened to them in spite of himself. A subtle fascination compelled him to join in the talk.

“I was at the Gare; I saw her go,” said the brewer, triumphantly. “She sat upon the right side; he pulled down the blind. Donnerwetter — if it had been this hand! I would have pulled down that blind myself — *et vous savez* — I have fifty years!”

Old Bonot stirred a glass of coffee vigorously.

“For myself,” he said, “the little church in the mountains, the village priest, and the village cart. These things are not for every eye to see. The English are different. This was the English marriage. The Englander carries his boots on

“A Looming Bastion” 29

the top of his carriage — I have seen them in London. You know London, Monsieur? Ah, what a city — what people — and funerals everywhere. I counted them — one, two, twenty — every day. And everyone so sad — because of the funerals. When I am in London, I stop at your, what you say, Zoho Square. It is the centre of your society. *Ma foi*, what a world! And no one laughs. I have never seen anyone laugh in London. It is too big. You are afraid to laugh. You must come to France for that — to France and the vineyards. We shall marry you here, and you will carry your boots on your carriage — hein?”

The old man gabbled on merrily, and took the cigar which Brandon offered him.

“You English know a cigar,” he said, “but your wines — ah, you have no wines. This very morning I had a hundred of your English cigars sent to Captain Lefort. He will smoke them on the mountains when Madame is old enough to differ from him. There is nothing like a good cigar on the day when you discover that Madame has opinions. Our friend the Captain will learn his lesson quickly. You know Madame — without doubt? I have seen her every day since she came to Strasburg five years ago. And she has opinions. I read them in her eyes. She is not what you

30 The Garden of Swords

English call the 'maid of all work.' There is courage, verve, the animation. She will know how to say 'I will not!'"

Brandon surveyed him with curiosity and amusement. Rosenbad, the brewer, who was no philosopher, resented his philosophy.

"You are gay again, old Bonot," said he. "I said that you would be a fine skeleton for their feast. You must catch the last train to Wörth and tell the Captain that he has married a wife who can say 'I will not.' He will be delighted to see you. As for me, she might say what she pleased if I were her husband."

"You, *mon vieux*, you are too fat. And in a lancer tunic, too! *Ma foi*, what a spectacle!"

The brewer avoided the subject deftly.

"They have spoiled our lancers," said he; "the new tunic is as ugly as the colour of it. There was something to make a man when they wore the kurtka. The new coat is the coat of the Prussian; do you not think so, Monsieur?"

He turned appealingly to a young sous-lieutenant of lancers, who had come up to the table and called for absinthe. But the lad scarcely heard the question.

"To the news from Paris!" he cried, raising his glass excitedly.

"There is news from Paris, then —"



“‘To the news from Paris!’ he cried.”

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“A Looming Bastion” 31

“The best. They are going to make a new king of Spain, and Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen is the man they have chosen.”

He spoke with an excitement characteristic of the boy rather than the man. For a moment the significance of his words was lost both upon old Bonot and upon Rosenbad, the brewer. The latter continued to sip his beer, the former to smoke his English cigar.

“Well,” exclaimed old Bonot at last, “and if he is the man, Monsieur —”

The sous-lieutenant regarded him almost with contempt.

“*Mon Dieu*,” he exclaimed, “you do not understand?”

“I understand nothing.”

The lad shrugged his shoulders.

“Then I cannot teach you,” said he.

He drank his absinthe at a draught and left the café. Brandon made some good excuse and followed upon his heels.

“Forgive me,” he said, as they stood together for a moment at the gate of the gardens, “but you are sure of what you say?”

“Sure of it? Absolutely. It is news from the Chambers — and it means but one thing, Monsieur. We shall be in Berlin in a fortnight.”

“But they may withdraw —”

32 The Garden of Swords

“I am going to church to-morrow to pray that they will not.”

He pulled his cloak about his shoulders and went swaggering away. But Brandon returned quickly to his house in the Rue des Pierres. It was as though a word had put fire into his veins.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE CHÂLET OF THE NIEDERWALD

BEATRIX was in the arbour of the châlet, filling a bowl with the pink roses which were the pride of her garden, when Edmond came up the road from the village of Elsasshausen and held up his letters triumphantly. Ten days had passed since the bells of Strasburg rang for Madame Hélène's grandchild. To Beatrix they had been as an unbroken hour of sunshine and of happiness. The hills and the valleys, the vineyards and farms of that pastoral scene were in keeping with the new sense of rest and of finality which had come upon her life. She wished for no friendship there, save the friendship which had been given her. The strange past, with its memories of strife and solitude and change unending, had been obliterated and forgotten. She had no longer the desire to return to England or to remember that she was an Englishwoman. A languorous indolence, bred of the mountains, possessed her as an ecstasy. She would have been content to hear that the châlet in the woods above the

34 The Garden of Swords

town of Wörth was to be her home until the end.

She was in the garden of the chalet, filling her bowl with roses, when Edmond returned with the letters which he had desired unceasingly. She could not understand that state of mind which hungered so greedily for all the dry bones of a soldier's gossip. To know that old Hélène was well, to hear of her horse and her dogs — and of old Susanne, who had been her mother's servant — that was news enough. But to be told that the sun was shining, or that Thérèse Laven-court had gone to Dieppe, or that Lieutenant Jourda de Vaux had been seen on a new charger — what were such things to those who had the forests of the Vosges for their skyline, and in the valleys below them the trailing vines and the white houses of the villages, and the murmur of brooks, and the sleepy river warming itself in the glorious sunshine of the ripened summer? She wished to forget Strasburg. The chalet of the Niederwald, the chalet of the pines, the chalet above the old-world town of Wörth — she would remember it always as the guest house of her dreams, the rose-girt cradle of her love.

If all this childish enthusiasm of hers was very real to her, she could not complain when her husband did not attain similar altitudes of

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 35

devotion to the châlet. The glitter and the movement of the cavalry life had become so much the mainspring of his thoughts and actions, that he did not always conceal his desire to fix a day when the hamlet of the Niederwald should become a memory of their holiday, and his old comrades of the "sixth" should congratulate him upon his return to them. Ready as he was to witness her childish delight in the solitude of the hills, yet he went every day to meet the *facteur*, who came from Wörth with the letters; and he read these letters aloud to her, and dwelt again and again upon every trivial word of gossip that had amused his brother officers.

When she ran to meet him at the garden gate on that morning of the fifteenth of July, she was glad, for his sake, to perceive that his letter hunger had been satisfied unduly. He carried a great white bundle in his hand, and he held it up triumphantly as a proud and well-earned possession. She remembered that day long afterwards — the sunshine on the woods, the white villages dotting the valley, the figure of her husband with his Tyrol hat and his knickerbocker suit. He had bought the Norfolk jacket in London as a compliment to her, and he called it a "Prince de Galles." But it suited his fine figure to perfection; and there was laughter in

36 The Garden of Swords

his eyes and the bronze of the sun upon his cheeks, when he put his arm about her and kissed her many times as a prelude to his news.

“Again, *ma chérie* — again for your letter — two for my letters. Wait, the Colonel writes himself, and Laroche and Giraud — and Bocheron; you know Bocheron, he is a sous-lieutenant — and Bouillie, he is the *Capitaine Trésorier* — and Gaudet, he is our *Porte Étendard*. *Sac à papier!* I shall have something to read for a week.”

He gabbled on, full of the excitement of the news anticipated and of the goodwill toward him to which the letters bore witness. She would find no cause of complaint in that, but was full of proposals for their day and its delights.

“You can read them as we go,” she said, holding his hand still and leading him toward the low door of the house. “I have told Jacob to have the pony ready at ten o’clock. We shall be at the Niederbronn by twelve, and you will be hungry. But we can breakfast in the wood, and that will be jolly. If one could always breakfast in a wood — upon *pâté de foie-gras* and strawberries. To be Phyllis always — with the last new novel, and a husband to cut the leaves. There’s the ideal life for you.”

He nodded his head and pressed her arm affectionately. The letter which he read carried

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 37

him back already in thought to Strasburg and his comrades.

“Listen,” he said; “old Tripard is furious about the new tunics. He is petitioning for the kurtka again and the old colours. They will match your eyes, Beatrix. We are to have the jonquille collars and the white cloaks with capes and sleeves. They are all right, but the people at Paris must give us back the kurtka. I do not want to look like a Prussian — *moi*. And the old coat was more comfortable. These tunics are for policemen. The regiment will not be the same in them. How can you remember Jena in a tunic made for a *sergent de ville*? They are spoiling us, and they will find it out when the day comes.”

She heard his complaint and laughed at it. Out there in the freshness of the garden, this talk of coat and cape was as some echo of a forgotten voice. She had eyes only for the green of the woods and the great red roses.

“Oh,” she said philosophically, “what does it matter, Edmond, and who wants to remember anything at the Niederwald? Here is a *Gloire de Dijon* which is worth all the tunics in France. We will remember things when the roses fade. There is always winter for memories. But July — and the mountains!”

38 The Garden of Swords

She took a bud of a deep scarlet hue from her bowl and pinned it in his coat. The flush of a young girl's health was upon the face which looked up at his own above the letter he was reading. He kissed her on the forehead, and forgave her because she did not condemn the tunic.

"Of course," he said, "it does not matter; but then tradition is a good deal. It is tradition in the army which enables one man to kill ten; *ma foi*, if you do away with tradition, Beatrix —"

"The ten will live. Happy ten! And we are forgetting the sunshine to talk about them. What prodigals!"

She turned toward the *châlet* with the bowl in her arms. He followed her with blind steps reading his letters as he went, and communicating their intelligence generously.

"The Chevalier is still at Trouville; he says the gout is no better. I shall have to send him to England to try port wine. We are to see him in Paris when he is well enough to bear the journey. *Pauvre papa!* I would wager a Napoleon that he was at the *Établissement* last night. There is nothing like the *valtz à trois temps* for his complaint. You must dance with my father some day, Beatrix, and say that he is splendid. When you do that, you will forgive him for his one day in Strasburg."

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 39

“ I hope so,” she said, with a little show of dignity. “ I am sure he must have been very ill.”

“ *Du tout,*” he said, “ he has never known a day’s illness in his life, though he calls himself a chronic invalid. There is not such a lazy man in France. He would not cross the street to save our country. You will never change him. But he will love you when he knows you well, as much—as much as I do !”

“ As much — your father !”

He laughed and drew her toward him, crushing the letter and spilling the water from the bowl.

“ Impossible,” he said. “ I forget what I am saying ; not one half, one quarter, one hundredth part, *chérie*. There can be no love like mine for little Beatrix.”

He had been annoyed that the Chevalier Lefort, his father, had declined the journey to Strasburg until the last moment, for this seemed to put some shadow of a slight upon his little wife. But the Chevalier, who did not by any means welcome an English girl to his house, was notoriously the laziest man in France. He had written his excuses regularly from the deck of his yacht *Le Cygne* pleading illness, the unfailing refuge of his indolence. There were other reasons on the yacht, less creditable and by no means to be presented to Beatrix. Edmond guessed those reasons, and

40 The Garden of Swords

found solace in the generous cheques which were the Chevalier's atonement.

"You will like my father," he said to her, "you will forgive him as I do."

"I hope so," she said lightly. "I could forgive anyone at the Niederwald — even you, dearest, for reading your ten letters when the pony is waiting."

She escaped his caress, and ran up the stairs lightly to set her hair straight and to put her roses in fresh water. She did not see that he had not her pleasure in the woods of Niederbronn, but hungered still for his comrades' letters and their news of his regiment. He had not heard a man's voice for ten days; peasants did not interest him. He could not tell one flower from another. He had no eye for the colour of glade and thicket. When he remembered that another ten days must pass before they left the ch[^]alet, he was even tempted to wish that he had chosen a city for his holiday. But of this he spoke no word to her. A sense of self-sacrifice pleased him. Her tenderness was a thing precious to see and to possess.

He brushed the "Prince de Galles," and was quite ready for her when she came singing down the stairs, and he helped her up to the driver's seat. She drove so badly, and "Apollo," surely, was

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 41

the ugliest pony in the Vosges. He said that risk was a thing a soldier should face for love of it; and declared that she would lead a charge superbly. The shady road through the mountains, the delicious wooded glades, the little white farmhouses, the fresh green heaths were for him so many items from a soldier's map. Some day the armies of France would cross the Vosges and enter Baden beyond the frontier. He talked of it always, even upon that early day of his happiness, when Beatrix drove him to the picnic in the thickets of the Niederbronn.

"What a road for light cavalry," he said, again and again; "with Pfalzburg at your back and Strasburg for your base, what a road to Berlin! We shall ride this road some day, *chérie*, and I shall show my comrades the old farmhouse, and tell them why I went there. You will be in Paris then, waiting for news of the victory. *Ma foi!* you will not wait long."

"But I shall be very old," she suggested. "You will be a general, and wear feathers for me to steal. And we shall have our own home in England. That would be ideal—a little house in Kent with an orchard and a meadow."

He nodded his head indifferently.

"There is no sun in England," he said; "I was there once for a week, and never saw him."

42 The Garden of Swords

All the orchards are in Normandy. And your people do not like the French. They say that they do, but it is not true. Why should we go to London when there is Paris? You have forgotten already that your father was an Englishman, *mignonne*; why should we go there to remember it?"

He was unconscious of that self which prompted his answer, nor would she think of it on such a day.

"I shall never forget my father," she said; "sometimes I try to think of all the men I know, and wonder which of them he must have been like. I was only five years old when he went to America. I cannot tell you why, yet I seem to remember him, though I have forgotten his face."

"I understand that," he exclaimed, though with no suggestion of sympathy in his voice; "there are many men that I can remember, though I could not draw them upon paper for you to save my life. Old Giraud, for instance, who writes to me from Paris this morning. I had forgotten Giraud. He writes of news that might have been good, but is very bad. There was the devil to pay in Spain. A word to the King of Prussia put an end to it. That is like those Prussians. They bark until you show the whip, and then they run to kennel. But it is our misfortune —"

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 43

She looked at him quickly.

“Your misfortune!”

He put his arm about her, and touched her ear with his lips.

“I am thinking of the army always,” he said earnestly; “it is the heart, the life of France. You will learn to think of it as I do by-and-by; it will be all in all to us. When I speak of a misfortune it is for your sake as well as for my own. Nothing can give me my chance but war. And my chance means fortune and honour for us both. But, of course, I do not wish it — yet, Beatrix.”

His mood became for the moment that mood of tenderness and of *abandon* to the impulse of love which had led him to make her his wife. It was a very real impulse in the instants of its recurrence; and when it betrayed him in look and voice, and she became conscious of it, the bond of the marriage vow seemed written anew, so that the twain were as one in heart and soul and affection. Strong in this assurance of devotion deep-rooted below the common interests of the daily life, Beatrix had no eyes to see those other things of self and will which might have been the omen of a new day when assurance should be less strong. She gave herself up in thought to him, yielding all to the sweet impulses of love unmeasured.

44 The Garden of Swords

She was his wife. Without him, life had no message for her.

“I know that you do not wish it, dearest,” she said earnestly, lifting her lips to his; “your honour is my honour. What fortune could I have which is not yours?”

He answered with an answer that a lover alone can give, and for some little while silence followed them up the slope of the mountain. Their way lay through woods odorous in pines, by hamlets green and red-roofed in the thickets of the heights. They found the glade of the Niederbronn, with its babbling brook and its shade of chestnut trees and its murmur of the life of summer; and it stood to them as some Eden set in the mountain's heart to be the home of their affections. And in this glade they lunched as two children abroad upon a holiday.

Remote brakes and dark places of the forest welcomed them when lunch was done, wandering hand in hand, lovers in a garden of their solitude: The health of the mountains shone in their eyes, or gave a new gift of youth to their cheeks. They spoke of no serious things.

“You have taught me to see that the trees are green, *chérie*,” he said, when the sun had set and “Apollo” was in the shafts again, and the lights of home began to be a pleasant memory.

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 45

“Some day, perhaps, I will turn farmer and wear a blouse, and you shall drive in the sheep. It would be good to come to Wörth when one had earned the right to rest, and could say, ‘I have done my work for France.’ But I am not one of those men who could take the holiday first and the work after. Even here, and with you at my side, I do not play at doing nothing well. To live is to achieve. The man who has achieved must have the first place at the fireside. When we build our house in the woods, we will people it with all the old friends we have left in Strasburg and in Paris, and we shall remember how we came here at the very beginning of it — before there were wars and victories.”

He did not mean to wound her. There was no thought in his mind but that of his old comrades of the barracks at Strasburg, and of the night just beginning for them. He saw them, in his imagination, in the cafés they haunted; he peeped into the great darkened stables, where the horses lay sleeping; he stood by his own charger; the vision showed him for an instant all the panoply and the glory of the service he loved. But she thought of none of these things. The smile of content left her face. The words which Brandon North had spoken in the *salon* of the old house were heard again in the murmur of the

46 The Garden of Swords

woods. The shadow of the night had fallen upon her pleasure.

“If the end could be as the beginning, dear,” she said, laying her hand upon his arm gently. “Of course, I know that it cannot; I knew that from the first. But when I am at Wörth, how can I help deceiving myself there? Should I love you if I did not? Why should we remember these things to-night, or even speak of them?”

He read a note of sadness in her voice, and hastened to atone.

“You shall not remember it, *mignonne*. I am a fool to talk so. There is home and dinner. When the day comes we shall be ready for it. But to-night — to-night I shall only tell you — ah, *mon âme*, what can I tell you that I have not told you a thousand times? I love you. Do you weary of my book, Beatrix? I can write nothing else but that — I love you.”

He pressed her to him, taking the reins from her hands and shielding her with his strong arm. The hour begat an exquisite tenderness. In the valley below them stars of lights shone out from many a farmhouse and many a village. Bells tinkled on the necks of the roving cattle. The breeze surged in the heights of the pines, scenting the air with sweet odours and the freshness of the night. Alone in that solitude of forest and upland

At the Châlet of the Niederwald 47

they seemed as those drawn apart from the living world to the very citadels of rest and of love. Even the hamlets became towns to them. Wörth itself, when they espied its lights between the descending spurs of the mountains, was as some great hive of men where love had no part or lot. The old farmhouse, welcoming them again, stood up as a home of their childhood.

Guillaumette, the servant, was at the door of the farm, with a story of dinner ready to be served. To Beatrix she said some pretty word of welcome, but to Edmond she handed a telegram, and he stood in the aureole of light cast out from the open door to read it. Beatrix never forgot that picture of him as, with white face and quickening heart, he read the message, once, twice, thrice, and then crushed the paper quickly in his hand.

He read the message and stood with pale face and trembling hand. A woman's instinct seemed to tell her that some great hour of her life was at hand. Their eyes met, and she read in his an intensity of love and sympathy such as she had never seen before.

“Edmond,” she said, almost in a whisper, “what is it? — why do you not tell me?”

He would have answered her, but finding no word he handed her the crumpled paper, and she opened it with maladroit fingers and spread it out

48 The Garden of Swords

and read it many times as he had read it. There were but two words, yet she had no need of any question to comprehend their meaning. The cord of her life seemed to snap in that instant. She turned from him and ran up the stairs with dry eyes.

CHAPTER V

THE HERALD OF THE STORM

SHE ran upstairs and closed the door of her bedroom behind her. For a little while he dare not intrude upon her, but stood at the foot of the stairs fearing, if he went up, to find her dying or dead in the room. A thousand thoughts, striking the whole gamut of a man's emotions, held him to the place. War and the glory of war, death and the risk of death; France and the call she had sent to him; love and sorrow and the moment of farewell — each was the outcome in its turn of that slip of yellow paper, upon which those two fatal words "Report yourself" were written. That which was even cowardice kept him for an instant from the darkened room upstairs and from its secret. She suffered there. He would have given half the years of his life could he have gone to her and taken her in his arms and said, "I will not go — my home is here."

A great silence fell upon the house. Little Guillaumette, who had seen her mistress's face, had run away to the kitchen and was crying her heart out there. An old wooden timepiece, which

50 The Garden of Swords

had ticked for the soldiers who, fought at Jena, struck the hour upon a crazy bell, and told them it was eight o'clock. Without, there was no sound but that of the leaves rustling and the murmur of the night. The man cast off the spell which the silence had put upon him, and called for Guillaumette when the clock struck.

“Guillaumette ! Guillaumette ! I must go back to Strasburg to-night. Let Jacob bring the pony and make my valise. Madame will come with me — I hope so. Where are you, Guillaumette ? ”

His voice sounded hollow and high-pitched. It echoed through the little rooms of the farm strangely. In his mind there were many confusing ideas, but only one impulse. He must return to his regiment at once. France had need of him. The day he had waited for was at hand. Beatrix would suffer now, but afterwards she would be glad. His courage was found in the idea ; he ran up the stairs at last and entered the darkened room.

She stood by the window. She had drawn the curtain back to look across the woods, down upon the lights of the villages. He saw that she had not taken off her hat, and that her left hand was still gloved. When he entered the room she turned her head wistfully, but did not speak to him. He crossed to her side and put his arm

The Herald of the Storm 51

about her, and wished that he could see tears in her eyes. The mute restraint and self-possession frightened him. When he kissed her on the forehead and drew her close to him, her face seemed on fire; he could feel her heart beating beneath the thin muslin dress which she had worn for their picnic.

“You will go with me,” he said in a low whisper. “I shall be in Strasburg to-morrow, and afterwards as the order comes. But it will be something to know that you are near. And *grand-mère* Hélène — but she is at Geneva. You would be alone in the house — until I come —”

She laid her cheek upon his as though to cool it. Tenderness and love and sacrifice of self were conveyed in every gesture. Her restraint amazed him. She answered him as one who had no complaint nor even argument to make.

“I could not go to Strasburg, Edmond. And you will not be there. Hélène would not wish it, I am sure of it. Let me stop at Wörth until you return. Jacob is here and Guillaumette. They will take care of me.”

He released her from his embrace, for he wished to find the light in that hour of darkness. There were a hundred ways, but he could not see one of them distinctly. Desire to console, excitement, sorrow for her, gladness for himself, were

52 The Garden of Swords

mingled in an incoherency of thought and of perplexity.

“It must have been yesterday,” he said. “The Colonel did not mention it in his letters. There has been a great trouble about Spain, and that telegram means that Lebœuf is calling out the reserves. Giraud said that it was finished; he did not mean to deceive me, and I understand. They would not spoil our holiday, *mignonne*, until they were compelled. Yesterday I heard things in the village, but would not tell you. They said that the King of Prussia had insulted us and wished for war. If that is the case, we shall be at Berlin in a fortnight. Everyone knew that it must come sooner or later; but that it should have come now! If it were not for your sake, Beatrix, I should be glad that it is so. There is nothing to fear for the armies of France. We shall fight across the Rhine, and you will not even hear the sound of the guns. I shall write every day, and a month will bring me back to you. Ah, my little wife, what a day to think of, when I shall hold you in my arms again and tell you of the battles! Is it not worth a month of waiting to have such a day as that? And you will get my letters every morning. Every morning I shall know that you are reading them. The time will pass before you dream of it. You will go to meet me at the

The Herald of the Storm 53

station before the grapes are off the vines. It will still be summer, and we shall have another picnic at the Niederbronn, and I shall show you where the armies of France marched to Germany. Ah, if it were not so hard !”

She had lit the lamp, mechanically and scarce knowing what she did, while he was speaking. The glow of light falling upon her face showed it as the face of one who had lived through a year of sorrows. His attempts to console her ended in a word that was half a sob. He realised that he loved her more than country or the ambitions of the old time. Pity for her surged up in his breast as an agony. She would be alone to think and to remember ; and he knew already what those hours of loneliness must mean to her.

“My love — my little wife ; God guard and keep you,” he said.

She pressed his hands linked in her own and began to speak of his journey. She did not wish him to see her face or to read the truth in her eyes.

“I shall wait here at Wörth, dearest,” she said ; “it is better that I should, for there is no one in Strasburg now. The worst may not happen, after all. And I should not care to go back to them. You will write to me to-morrow and tell me where the regiment is. Perhaps I may see you again

54 The Garden of Swords

before you go to Germany. And I will write to you every day. It will be something to do even if you do not get the letters."

She made a brave show of bearing up; and he understood and was grateful to her. There was so much to do, a valise to pack, uniform to be put on, a hundred things to be spoken of. Neither thought of food, nor of the dinner Guillaumette had cooked. Silently and with method, and with dry eyes always, she began to help him. In the valley without, the mute heralds of rain and storm permitted all other sounds to be heard clearly. An engine whistled upon a distant railway; a dog barked in a garden at Wörth; the grasses rustled fitfully as in the hour of coming tempest. Beatrix heard the sounds and was strangely conscious of them. She knew not why she suffered silently. Many times she had the desire to lay her head upon her husband's shoulder and there to give freedom to her grief as a child at a mother's breast. A voice said to her always, "You will be alone." She clenched her hands, and turned her face from him again.

"Little wife, give me courage such as yours."

It was his last farewell at the gate of the garden wherein her roses grew. For an instant, she remembered that she might be holding his hands and hearing his words for the last time. All the

The Herald of the Storm 55

depth and intensity of her love compelled her so that she clung to him distractedly and with all her courage gone. He felt her tears upon his cheek, and was glad because of them. His strong arms crushed her dress and so held her that she seemed to stand heart to heart with him.

“Good-bye, *mignonne*. To-morrow I will write; in a month I will be home again.”

He stepped into the cart, and the pony began to trot down the hill to Wörth. The little farm with its lighted windows stood out on the mountain side as a cluster of stars above the garden of his home. He saw her again for an instant, her white dress fluttering against the background of the forest. He dare not ask himself what the night would mean to her. He did not know that when a month had passed, an Empire would have fallen, and the armies of France be no more.

From the valley, a blare of bugles echoed suddenly through the silent hills. Troops were moving already, then! The note thrilled him as with all the fire of battle and of war. To-morrow he would ride with his regiment again.

But to Beatrix, listening at the gate of the garden, the trumpet's note was as some call to the place of death and tears.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST DAY OF JULY

THE sun had hardly begun to shine upon the glades of the Niederwald on the last day of July when Beatrix opened the window of her bedroom and looked over the woods and the green vineyards to the little white town of Wörth and the glistening river in the hollow of the valley. It was her habit now to wake at dawn, for sleep had ceased to be her friend; and there was a morning hope of the sunshine as though the day would bring some news of Edmond or of his regiment. Sometimes in her dreams she would believe that the reality was but imagination, or that she would awake to hear her husband's voice. Every step upon the road before the farmhouse quickened her heart, and sent her breathlessly to the garden gate. The ultimate hope, that all might yet be well, was the solace of many an hour. They told her in the village that peace must come before the grapes were ripe. "It will be a race," the old curé said; "those Prussians will run to Berlin and we shall run after them. In a month Monsieur will be home again."

The Last Day of July 57

She listened to the old priest's boast and loved him for it. The silence of the woodlands helped her to self-deception. What war could there be when the glades were sleeping in the sunshine, and the kingfisher hovered above the limpid pools, and the church bells sent their message to the heights, and all things were as yesterday in the homes of the simple people about her? The very word seemed an irony. Yet war had taken Edmund to Strasburg and to his regiment. War had left her alone in the first hour of happiness inexpressible!

There had been rain all night, but the looming mists were scattered in the first hour of dawn on that last day of the month, and a surpassing freshness of the morning fell upon the glades and the gardens before her window. Every leaf had gathered its little gift of dew and husbanded the finest hues to give them out in a spectrum of violet and crimson, and the purest blues. Her roses shed their leaves upon the sparkling grass or lifted their heads to the dews in bursting blossoms and glossy petals. The very air seemed to rise up from a sea of the sweetest perfumes, and to fill the lungs with all the fulness of life realised. It was a scene of day glorified; a scene of Nature new-robed and awakened; of the apotheosis of solitudes. She gazed upon it,

58 The Garden of Swords

spell-bound and entranced. She could not remember yesterday in such an hour. Nevertheless, yesterday spoke to her—for there, upon the white road of the valley, the white road which the poplars fringed, was a regiment of chasseurs riding southward to Strasburg. Even at the window of her house she could hear the bugles blowing and the clatter of the waggons. The trumpet's note thrilled her as a voice of war itself. She turned from the window and ran down to the kitchen of the house where Guillaumette was singing.

“ Good-day, Madame—you hear the soldiers! Oh, that is good—all day the music and at night the chasseurs. They are going to make the Prussians dance—hein? And then Monsieur will come home again. Do not doubt it at all, Madame. A month and there will be no more music. We shall all go to Strasburg and Monsieur will be a general. The curé says it, and he knows. A thousand horses in the village yesterday—and all night long the tramp, tramp, tramp! Oh, I can sleep well to the tramp, tramp, tramp—*moi!* I think of Gaspard, who has gone to bring me a mug from Berlin. There is nothing else in Berlin but mugs and sausages. That is why these Prussians are so fat. But they will run, run, run

The Last Day of July 59

presently. The Emperor has gone to Metz — eh piff, pouf, boum, where is your Bismarck then !”

Guillaumette was a wench of Grenoble, small of foot, relentless of tongue, with pretty hair and a young girl's face against which the sun had warred in vain. To her, war and the rumour of war were an unbroken delight. There would be troopers in the hills all day. Why, then, should anyone be sad? She could not conceive that state of mind which brought tears to the eyes a second time for the lover who had gone to the wars. If he came home — it would be with gifts in his hand. If he did not come home — well, there were horsemen all day on the road to Strasburg. She spent her hours in the old kitchen, where the copper stove shone like a plate of gold; and when she was not singing “*Allons, enfants de la patrie,*” her ballad would be : —

“ Cent mille francs
Sont attrayants,
Morbleu, j'en conviens sans peine,
Mais ce tendron
Triple escadron
Fait flotter mon âme incertaine.”

Beatrix listened to her blithe words and took heart in spite of herself. This child of the

60 The Garden of Swords

people could teach her a lesson, she thought. It was a lesson of duty; a lesson which war may teach even to a woman.

“Ah, Guillaumette,” she said, “if you were a prophetess —”

“*Cbut*, Madame, why should I be a prophetess to say that the Prussian louts are going to run? Look at the chasseurs *là bas*—the horses, the gold and silver, the splendid fellows. It is the same everywhere. Gaspard tells me so. Everywhere, everywhere, the music and the colour and the big moustaches of the cuirassiers —and not a Prussian in all the mountains. Why are we here, drinking our coffee as yesterday? It is because of the chasseurs who go to Berlin on their horses. Ah, Madame, if there were any bonnets there! If there were anything over yonder but the mugs and the beer —”

She raked the fire angrily, and poured the steaming milk and coffee into the basins.

“*Dame*,” she said triumphantly, “look at that. No wonder the Prussians come to the Rhine for coffee, Madame. You will drink it in the garden. And afterward the post. Oh, the blessed post with news of Monsieur and the army. And the sunshine: Madame will ride her pony to-day? Certainly she will. I will

The Last Day of July 61

tell Jacob. He sleeps all day, the lazy one. The Prussians are coming, he says! Oh, the poltroon! They are thousand miles away. The curé says so. As if there could be a blue coat at Wörth! I laugh when I hear it. And the chasseurs in the village! It is splendid, this war!"

She showed all her delight in her eyes — for war was a very carnival to her — a carnival which must people the hills with red breeches presently and awake the mountains to the martial music which quickened her steps and gladdened her heart. Hearing her, Beatrix could even tell herself that the supreme hour of her life had not been lived. How, if this little chatterer were right, and a month brought Edmond back to Wörth, and France were victorious, and all his joy of victory were added to her joys of love! She could dream of such a day on that morning of sunshine and of rest. For the white road was deserted again when she carried her coffee to the arbour of roses. The old white houses slept once more. The woods echoed to no music but the music of the leaves.

It was at seven o'clock when the postman came and brought her two letters — a long one from Grandmère Héléne, who had left Geneva that day, and a short one from Edmond, who

62 The Garden of Swords

was at Strasburg still, but spoke of an immediate march northward to Hagenau. "You will be able to drive over, *chérie*," he said, "and I shall tell you everything. Here it is all noise and dust and trumpets all day. I cannot believe the things I see—I cannot believe that France is at war. We wait always. We go to sleep at night, and torches guide us to our beds, and students sing our lullaby. I have heard the Marseillaise a thousand times since yesterday. There is no road to the north which the waggons do not block and the troops follow. Ah, *mignonne*, if I could ride upon one of those roads to a little white house and take a little white figure in my arms! But the day will not be distant. The end is near. France will justify herself. I shall be at Hagenau before the month is out—and then—what a harvest time for us. And the vines will still be green. A thousand messages of love to the little wife who is waiting for me, and who has forgotten already that there is any other country but France."

She held the letter long, gazing wistfully over the woods which thrust themselves up to blot out the view of distant Hagenau. The words of love and confidence brought tears to her eyes. Yet was it true? she asked. Had she indeed forgotten those green lanes of England

The Last Day of July 63

wherein her girlhood had been spent? Was she heart and soul faithful to this new country which had given her a home—and Edmond? She could not answer those questions, but crushed the letter in the bosom of her dress and told herself gladly that to-morrow might bring him to her—to-morrow he would tell her again that he loved her and that she was all to him.

Old Hélène's letter covered many pages. Beatrix skipped them, remembering what to-morrow would bring. Nevertheless, she could permit her imagination to see the beloved face, the trembling hand that wrote the wavering lines. The exhortation that she should return to Strasburg at once troubled her. She had no thought for the city, now that Edmond was to march out of it. The old farm had become a home like no other house which had ever received her. Every room seemed to whisper her lover's name. A memory of him was written upon the most trifling ornament. The roses in her arbour were his roses. She treasured the very leaves of them. The woods retold her love in the murmur of brook and branches. She would not quit a house so dear to her, though all the armies of Germany had been at the gate of it.

64 The Garden of Swords

The *facteur* had brought the letters at seven o'clock, but eight o'clock struck before she left the arbour and returned to tell her news to Guillaumette.

“Monsieur will be at Hagenau to-morrow, Guillaumette. He may be here on Tuesday. The regiment is to march; his letter says so. And, of course, he would wish to have his friends here. We must be ready against that — he will expect it of us. It would never do to disgrace the *châlet* after all the things he will have told them. I am going down to Wörth now — ”

Guillaumette put her arms upon her hips and laughed loudly.

“*Vela, vela* — we are going to Wörth now, and we forget that it is Sunday ! ”

She had forgotten it, indeed, and she stood with a rosy flush upon her cheeks and the old straw bonnet swinging by its ribbons in her hand. The excitement of the week had robbed her of any memory of days. She heard the bells of the village churches, and all her English reverence for Sunday came to reproach her. Guillaumette, on her part, did not love the priests. She began to bustle about the kitchen again.

“ We shall not go to Wörth to-day,” she said.

The Last Day of July 65

“We shall go to Mass to see if there are any soldiers there. That is what Sunday is for. There will be cuirassiers upon the road, and the hussars ride by to Bitche. I heard it in the village. If Monsieur comes back to-morrow and brings his friends, it will be the wine for which he will ask. It is always like that. Wine, wine, wine — and when the wine is all gone, *bon jour!* Oh, I know those fellows — I, Guillaumette. Do not think about them, Madame. They will drink us up — and then — to the wars!”

There was no argument possible with Guillaumette when she had spoken. She was as imperious as a general of armies. Beatrix used to surrender at once, telling herself that Guillaumette was always right. And an idea came to her when she remembered that it was Sunday. She would ride her pony to that glade of the Niederbronn which had been the home of their picnic on the day that Edmond left her. She could not sit in a church, she thought. The deeper gifts of religious consolation were lost in the unrest and doubt of such an hour. The impulse to be doing something was irresistible.

The sun was still shining when old Jacob brought the pony to the door, but scuds of grey and black cloud loomed above the valley, and the breeze had fallen away again until it was

66 The Garden of Swords

scarce a whisper in the trees. She heard the bells of Wörth and of other villages, whose red roofs and white houses dotted the valley below her. But there were no soldiers upon the road, and everywhere it was as though the spirit of the God of peace had come upon the mountains.

CHAPTER VII

"THOSE OTHERS"

SHE struck the road to the village of Reichshofen, and followed it upward through the forest. There were few abroad upon it, and such as she met were peasants going to Mass. An old woman, red-checked and hale, gave her good-day, and added that her son was at Châlons. A group of harvesters played dominoes upon a knoll of grass at the roadside, but stood up awkwardly when she passed. A farmer, driving a weedy brown horse, drew rein as he approached, and asked if there were any soldiers between him and the village. To such as these news of war was little more than news of that distant Paris which interested them so little. The Emperor was going to Berlin! What mattered it to men who were watching the ripening grape or husbanding the maize and the tobacco?

It was dark in many of the thickets, and she rode impetuously, now galloping, now letting the pony go as he would. At the cross-roads, a little way from Reichshofen, she heard a clatter of

68 The Garden of Swords

hoofs behind her and turned her head to see a little old man on a great grey horse, whose outspread cloak and upturned elbows gave him the appearance of a flying mill. She recognised him as the kinsman of the Count of Durckheim, whose château lay beyond Froeschweiler, and she saw that he wished to speak to her. There was no greater gossip in the mountains. He would have the last news from Strasburg, she was sure.

“Good-day, Madame; did you think that I was a Prussian? You ride like a hussar! I have seen your pony’s heels ever since you passed the white mill. And to church, too!”

He took a gold snuff-box from his pocket and spilled the snuff upon his white breeches and his once fine vest. Exertion had brought drops of sweat to his forehead. He regarded the little English girl as some treasure of the forest sent by providence to reward him. She, in turn, was amused by his candour, and glad to hear a friendly voice.

“Good-day, Monsieur Picard — and what makes you think that I am riding to church?” she asked.

He dusted the snuff from his coat, and settled himself in the saddle, as though his way was, from that time, her way.



“ Turned her head to see a little old man on a great grey horse.”

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“There are two roads, Madame,” he said with a flourish of his arm, “to church and to Berlin. As you are not upon the latter, there can only be the former. And you are wise. All France goes the other way —”

His eccentricity always pleased her.

“And you, yourself, Monsieur, you are on the same road?”

“Impossible to take any other when Madame Lefort rides. I shall go to the church door. It will be an example to the people!”

“But if I am not going to church —”

“In that case there will be no example. We shall talk of Paris and the army.”

He was full of self-content, and the heavy clouds which cloaked the sun, and sent the birds skimming low in the open places of the thickets, were not heeded by him. There was no one else upon the road to Niederbronn now; even the glades were hushed. Nature listened for the storm which was gathering above the pass.

“Captain Lefort is at Strasburg with Duhesme’s brigade,” Beatrix said, seeing that he waited for her; “he may be at Hagenau tomorrow, and I shall ride there. He does not know where his regiment is going to — at least, he can only guess it is to be sent to the north.

70 The Garden of Swords

General MacMahon will meet the Emperor at Saarbruck. You have heard that, Monsieur?"

"I have heard it all, Madame. Everyone in France guesses to-day. We have seven bodies in command of seven armies. When we find one head we shall begin. We are waiting for that. If the Prussians would only wait, too, it will be a great war. I have come from Paris, and I know. Ah, what enthusiasm in Paris, Madame, what torches, what songs, what a brave people. Our generals are moved to the very heart. They were all in the bonnet shops when I came away. We are a nation of courtiers. We do not leave our ladies at home when we go to the wars. Why should we — since the road to Berlin is open and our horsemen will ride there by-and-by, and we have waggons for the crinolines. You are an Englishwoman and you have married a Frenchman. You understand these things. The poor people we see around us — they understand them, too. War is far away from them to-day. It will be over there, oh, such a long way off, in Berlin, where the Prussians are. If it came here, to their homes, their fields, their villages — if they saw their children carried out to the graves in the woods — ah, if they saw their children, the children who have not made the war, who do not cry *À Berlin*, if they saw them — it would be different,

Madame. But we shall not see it ; the Emperor has said so ; the seven bodies have said so. The head will come to us presently — and then, *en avant !*”

He was a strange old man, Beatrix thought, while she watched him sitting there awkwardly upon the great horse, and lifting his hat as though commanding all the soldiers of France. The mingled earnestness and levity of his address moved her strangely. How true it was, that no one in all those villages and farms of Alsace had ever remembered that war might bring the soldiers of Germany across the Rhine even to the doors of their houses. While the sun shone, and the birds sang, and the vines ripened, how could they tell themselves that to-morrow might not be as yesterday ? She, herself, was no wiser than the others. Edmond was coming to Hagenau ! What else could she remember ?

“Oh, Monsieur Picard,” she exclaimed a little sadly, “you do not really believe what you say ?”

“I, Madame, I believe nothing. It is an easy creed which never leads you to contradictions. When I peep through the woods to the village down there and see the red roofs, and hear the Mass bells ringing, and watch the old folks going to church, I say — this is war, this is glory, here

72 The Garden of Swords

lies the road to Berlin. Why should I think otherwise? There are no Prussians here; there never will be any. Your husband is a soldier and what is he doing? He is thinking of a charming wife who is taking care of his chalet at the Niederwald. To-morrow he will see her. In a month he will cross the Rhine again and tell her how many Prussians he has killed. If the children die, they will be the children of Germany, not of France. *Vive la France*, then, and let us light some more torches. Paris is doing it all night. Why should we be behind-hand? Not at all—we will do as Paris does, and when we are hoarse with shouting we will go and drink the Rhine wine!”

He did not see that his irony was lost upon her, and that she had begun to be very serious again. A little pattering of rain upon the great broad leaves troubled him exceedingly; he wrapped his cloak about his throat.

“Madame,” he said suddenly, “I am old enough to be rheumatic. That is an age which moves youth either to ribaldry or to compassion. In your case it will be compassion. Let us shelter a moment and forget that there is a good *déjeuner* to be had in the inn at Niederbronn.”

He turned abruptly into a little glade of the woods, and she recognised it as the glade to

which Edmond had taken her — how long ago it seemed — on the day of his farewell. The very straw which had lined their basket was still upon the grass. She could have repeated every word of love he had whispered to her that day. An exquisite memory of his caress made her limbs tremble. Until old Picard spoke again she forgot that Edmond had left her.

“Come,” he said, “here is a glade made to match your pretty dress, Madame. Let us shelter until the sun remembers that we have had no breakfast. As for those other fellows — !”

He did not finish his sentence, for a sound as of horses at the gallop rang out above the murmur of the woods and the patter of the rain. For a little while they listened intently as the sounds magnified in approach. Beatrix thought at the first that it might even be Edmond’s lancers who had come from Hagenau. Old Picard put his hand to his ear and a curious expression settled upon his face.

“As for those other fellows — you hear their horses, Madame ?”

“There is someone on the road behind us,” she answered quickly.

“Ah,” he continued, “then I can still hear. When you are my age, you will begin to take your senses out of the cupboard and to see how

74 The Garden of Swords

many are left. I count mine every day. The eyes to see my friend Madame Lefort, the taste to admire her, the ears to hear her, the touch which tells me that her hand is the smallest in Alsace — ah, Madame, how rich I am. We shall tell those other fellows — if there are many of them — do you hear many horses, Madame?”

She listened again. Whoever rode toward Niederbronn had urgent business to help him on the way.

“It will be the chasseurs!” she said with some little excitement, born of the uncertainty. “I saw them this morning upon the road to Hagenau—”

“Madame,” he exclaimed, “they are not chasseurs — they are—”

Again his sentence was unfinished. He stopped abruptly and took his snuff-box from his pocket. When he had dusted his vest very deliberately, he continued—

“They are Prussians, Madame Lefort — Uhlans from across the Rhine. Look at them well. We shall see many in France before the year is out!”

He pointed dramatically with his finger as two horsemen rode suddenly into view; their presence was a vindication of his words. Beatrix had met few German soldiers before that day; and now when she saw these two Uhlans, who reined back

their horses as much from curiosity as from prudence, she did not believe for a moment that they were not Frenchmen. Certainly their tunics of light blue, with the scarlet cuffs and shoulder-straps, and the eagles upon their hemlets, were strange to her. It would be some regiment she had not met with either in Strasburg or in Paris, she thought.

The Uhlans halted before the glade, but when they saw a harmless old man with a young girl at his side sheltering from the rain, broad smiles covered their faces, and they beckoned to others behind them. There were fifteen in all, Beatrix counted, sturdy fellows, splashed from head to foot with the mud, sunburnt, bearded, yet well horsed and full of ready activity. One who seemed to be a captain, and who spoke French with a guttural accent, bowed low to her and asked the way to an inn.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, “*si fou foulez m’indiquer une auberge par ici.*”

She knew not why it was, but a strange sense of fear and foreboding came to her when she heard the man speak. She did not realise that troopers out of Baden, for such they were, had ridden into France; but a vague consciousness of danger environing her was not to be avoided. Nevertheless, she would have answered

76 The Garden of Swords

the question if old Picard had not been before her.

“Herr Captain,” he said, “there is an inn five miles from here. You turn to the right.”

The Uhlan shrugged his shoulders.

“Which means to the left,” he said; “and then, *mon ancien!*”

Picard shut his snuff-box with a snap.

“And then—you can go to the devil.”

The German seemed amused.

“I am on the right road, Monsieur,” he said; “this is the way to Paris, I believe.”

He let his horse go, for one of the sergeants pointed out the red roofs of the buildings peeping up through the glade of the thicket. When he had observed them, he bowed again to Beatrix and addressed her, to her infinite surprise, in English as good as her own.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, “beware of that old man. He does not tell the truth.”

He was gone with the words, and she saw him a few moments later as he rode up to the farm and began to beat loudly upon the door. Old Picard, who was nodding his head and snuffing incessantly, vouchsafed no remark. She, on her part, had viewed the event as some scene of a play. Uhlans at Niederbronn! She did not believe it even then.

“Oh, Monsieur Picard,” she said, turning her pony suddenly, “you do not mean it; they were not really Germans?”

“Madame,” he said with a shrug of his shoulders, “what I mean or do not mean is of little account.”

“But if they are Germans what are they doing upon the road to Niederbronn?”

He stroked his chin.

“They are doing what we should have done an hour ago — they are having their breakfasts, my child. Let us go home and imitate them. The sun does not shine any longer upon us. It will be a long time before the sun shines upon France again, dear Madame.”

She saw that he was very thoughtful, and the sense of unrest and of danger on the road returned to her. If there were Prussian lancers at Niederbronn, would there not be others at Wörth and Hagenau? In that instant the great truth that this war might, indeed, come to the homes of France was realised by her. Fear for Edmond, a fear she had not known before, began to possess her, and would not be quieted. She asked herself what she was doing there, so far from the châlet, when he might have need of her or even have sent a second message.

“Oh! let us go,” she said, urging her pony

78 The Garden of Swords

to the road again; "our place is at home, Monsieur Picard."

He followed her reluctantly, and wished to allay her fears.

"*Chut*, Madame — I would not have missed the spectacle for a bucket full of francs. We must get used to it. There will be Germans upon this road every day before the summer is gone. They will not often be so fortunate as those fellows *là-bas*, who have just seen my little English friend in her pretty habit. And there will be others who will have something to say to them. My word — hark to that. The watch-dogs understand the German language, eh! Do they not speak it beautifully?"

He halted his horse again and listened to the strange sounds of mingled voices and the baying of hounds. Those troopers, then, were arguing with the people of the house! He thought that he could see the horses of some of them through the network of leaf and branch. The road itself was deserted, and the rain began to fall again in heavy drops, which glistened upon the flat leaves and gave waves to the puddles. Beatrix herself could not understand his curiosity, but she feared now to be alone upon the road.

"Oh, Monsieur Picard," she said at last, "if I were not so cold —"

He sighed at her impatience, and was about to ride on, when the report of a rifle shot rang out above the silence of the woods and the patter of the rain. Birds went winging from the trees as the echoes rolled from hill to hill and glade to glade. A loud shouting was heard at the farm — the cries of men who found themselves face to face with death. Two Uhlans came galloping wildly up the pass, with five horsemen pressing close upon them. They went by, a flash of blue and silver; but one of those who rode after them had a sabre in his hand, and he struck at the trooper before him.

It was the vision of an instant: the vision of faces set in anger and ferocity; of eyes staring horribly at the images of death they saw; of horses foaming and accoutrements glittering and mud splashing. Yet so real was it that Beatrix cried out when the men passed her. She tried to hide the vision from her eyes, but could not. She feared to see the shining blade fall upon the neck of the Uhlan, who rode as though he raced with Death. No murder committed, there, at the roadside, could have filled her with a greater horror.

“Oh, my God, he will kill him!” she cried again and again.

She buried her face in her hands and would let

80 The Garden of Swords

her eyes follow the horsemen no more. Old Picard, on his part, did not try to help her. The spectacle was as wine to him. Blood coursed through the blue veins of his cheeks and forehead. He gripped the reins until his nails cut the flesh. He did not know that the rain fell upon his face or that the sun had ceased to shine. The story that he tried to tell her was almost incoherent.

“The hussars from Bitche—eh, Madame? Do you not see that they give them their breakfast? They were in the house then—they were at the farm. *Ma foi*, what a meeting, what a dish! Keep close to me, child. Do not look at them. They are the hussars from Bitche. The splendid fellows!”

He drove his horse before her and began to breathe quickly as a hunted animal. One of the Uhlans had ridden through the gates of the farm and a French hussar was at his heels. No race at Longchamps or Chantilly was like that race for life up the road of the pass. Old Picard saw that the pursued was the officer who had spoken to him at the glade. He did not bear him any grudge, yet wished to see him die. It was as though the troops of France had sounded the horn and started a fox from the thicket. The game must be killed; that was all. And the hussars would kill it. He read their ferocity in

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“ Fired wildly on the stooping figure before him.”

their faces. The hunted man was their prey. They were as beasts hungering for blood. All that they had learned in barracks and upon the field schooled them to this lust of blood. The very excitement of it sent them rolling in their saddles; the intoxication of it was almost delirium. “*En avant, en avant!*” The cry was hardly human. It was the scream of men who hasten to see another die.

Twenty paces from the tree whereunder Beatrix stood, the end came. One of the Frenchmen, seeing that the Uhlan's horse outpaced his own, drew a revolver and fired wildly at the stooping figure before him. There was no sign upon the instant that the bullet had hit its mark; but, when the doomed man had come up almost to the tree, he raised himself in his saddle and threw his arms above his head. Beatrix saw his face; a smile seemed to play upon it. For a moment the smile hovered there; then, suddenly, a white shadow crept up from chin to forehead, the eyes set to a wild stare, blood gushed from the mouth; the German fell headlong from his horse and lay dead at her feet.

“*La France, la France!*”

Twenty voices took up the cry in frenzied triumph. Other horses galloped by upon the road to Wörth. The Uhlan lay, face downward, in

82 The Garden of Swords

the mud. Old Picard, hat in hand, paid his tribute to the dead. Beatrix heard him speak to her, but his voice seemed an echo of a voice far off.

“My child,” he said, “the sun does not shine upon us any more. Let us go home.”

His words awakened her as from a horrid sleep. The rain fell in torrents on the open road of the pass. She shuddered to her very heart, but it was not from the cold.

CHAPTER VIII

OVER THE HEARTS OF FRANCE

SHE did not ride to Hagenau on the morrow, for the *facteur* brought a letter saying that the regiment was still waiting to complete its numbers, and had need of many things. Three days of suspense intolerable passed, but on the morning of the fourth a trooper, who had been in the saddle half the night, galloped to the ch  let at dawn and brought the great news that the "Sixth" were upon the road to W  rth, and would be camped on the Niederwald before the sun set. MacMahon's army was on the march at last, the fellow said. He would join de Failly at Bitche and thereafter unite with Bazaine to give battle to the Prussians who were marching to the Rhine. "Madame would see the Captain that evening. He was bringing four of his brother officers to dinner. To-morrow the regiment would rest, but the next day it would march again. He, himself, must ride into the village of Elsasshausen and billet the others who would come after. But he could drink a bottle of wine — and he had not eaten for twenty hours."

84 The Garden of Swords

Guillaumette took the trooper to the kitchen, and kept him there until the bell for Mass was ringing. Already, on the high-road below, the signs of the coming invasion were many. Jaded infantrymen, gunners with mud upon their very faces, weary horses stumbling through the mire, heavy waggons rolling in the ruts, horsemen crying out for food and wine, companies of Turcos and zouaves, the outposts of cuirassiers, staff officers, who rode at the gallop — all these began to block the road from Hagenau and even the by-paths through the woods. The rolling of the drums and the blare of the bugles were incessant. Rain fell pitilessly, so that the very brooks were as muddy rivers, and all the thickets droned to the babbling music of the swollen torrents. Far away towards the south the sky was an unbroken envelope of mist. The gloom of the day was intense and infectious, so that men marched listlessly and with heavy feet which squelched in the clinging mud. Many a cottage had been already deserted. The women fled to the hills before the advancing hosts. The armies of France marched on over the hearts of France.

Beatrix spent the day in a work of love which brought colour to her cheeks again, and the light to her eyes. She would see Edmond that night, if it were but for an instant. The link which the

Over the Hearts of France 85

fatal day had broken would for an hour be welded again. That sense of utter loneliness, which had been with her always since he had left her, was forgotten in the new thought of his return. The sight which she had seen upon the road to Niederbronn, the dead Uhlan lying face downward in the mud—the first blood offering to those who cried, “Let there be war,” had taken so grim a hold upon her imagination that she thought death alone would obliterate the memory. Fear for herself, whom all had forsaken, fear for the house and her home, dread of the solitude of the hills which war had awakened was hers no more. Edmond was coming back. She would show him that she had learned the lesson; that she could suffer, if need be, for the country wherein she had found so great a happiness.

It was a busy day, and she tried to see nothing, to hear nothing of those sights and sounds upon the high-roads. There were roses to gather from her garden, and dinner to be thought of, and rooms to be made bright, and a hundred little things to do. Even Guillaumette’s despair could not trouble her. Edmond was coming back. There was a moment when she said to herself that she could wish he was coming alone; but she rebuked her own selfishness, and went on with her work.

“We must do our best, Guillaumette. They

86 The Garden of Swords

will not expect too much now. Captain Chandellier comes and Major de Selay. We must put them in the white room. If Lieutenant Giraud is with them he must sleep in the nursery—”

Guillaumette clapped her hands.

“Oh, I know Giraud, Madame—what a man! He is the great big boy—like that. He eats the soup with the sabre—hein? He will eat us up, Madame. And the Capitaine Chandellier—what an appetite, and we have but two pigeons and a cabbage for the *soupe*—!”

“Jacob shall ride to the village,” Beatrix said; “they will have eggs and poultry at the farm. I will go there myself—”

“But, Madame—! Look at the road and say how you shall go. Red and blue, red and blue—and the cannons everywhere, and the great fellows who know a pretty face, and the little fellows who must stand on tiptoe to kiss you—oh, I know those fellows. And I shall be the Captain in this house. Monsieur has wished it. Do not fear for me, Madame. Guillaumette knows the chasseurs. I shall go to the farm and the sergeants will stand upon the tiptoes. To me it is nothing. I box the face—oh, I have done it often.”

Beatrix found the merry voice tuned to her own new-gotten gaiety. Since that day of her pilgrim-

Over the Hearts of France 87

age to Niederbronn the burden of the hours had been a heavy one, but now she cast it off, and had forgotten that to-morrow she must take it up again. Everything in her home reminded her of Edmond. Sometimes she would stand before her glass to ask herself if he would find her changed, with eyes less bright and cheeks that lacked their colour. But the mirror told no such tale. There was laughter upon the pretty face it showed to her; a flush of pink suffused the clear white skin; the glossy black hair curled about the open forehead, and fell bewitchingly over the little ears. And she had put on the muslin gown and the sun-bonnet he loved. Those who saw her at the door of the chalet, where she stood waiting for him, would have named her as some pretty school-girl, returned to her home from a convent. Yesterday, they would have said that she was a woman who had learned some of the lessons which life can teach.

The pitiless rain had ceased early in the afternoon, and for a little while the sun shone warm and clear upon the woods. Down there, upon the road to Strasburg, all the armies of France seemed to be blocked in confusion inextricable. Cuirassiers with dulled breastplates, hussars with bedraggled shakoes, artillerymen lashing their horses, aides-de-camp roaring oaths, waggons locked to-

88 The Garden of Swords

gether, gun-carriages stuck in the ditches, staff officers threatening, peasants mad with terror — all these poured in toward Wörth, and the camps which MacMahon had found for them there. Even on the height above the valley, the woodland scene had quickened to the note of music and the tramping of the squadrons. Watch-fires sent their smoke curling above the shading trees; troopers stood at the cottage doors and clamoured loudly for bread and wine; horsemen passed the *châlet* riding wildly to Reichshofen and to Bitche. The very air seemed full of unrest; the birds winged upward fearing the cries they heard in the woods below them.

From sunset onward Beatrix never left the watching place by the garden gate. Every little pennant fluttering upon a lance down there on the high-road could make her heart tremble and bring blood to her cheeks. She was surprised that all this stress and toil of war moved her so little. The red fires burning in the woods, the echoes of the drums, the flying horsemen — all seemed in harmony with that hour of expectation. Edmond was coming home. Those who had no home, begging of her for the children's sake as they fled to the mountains, moved her to an infinite pity. She saw their little wealth of home piled upon carts and waggons; she saw the

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“He came at sunset, galloping up the high road.”

Over the Hearts of France 89

children, hungry and outcast, before this wave of war, and her heart bled for them. If she had been an outcast with them, holding a child in her arms and knowing not whether to-morrow would give life or death! But she was all blest. Edmond was coming back to her.

He came at sunset, galloping up the high-road on his heavy charger. The mud had whitened his boots and found its way even to the dark blue tunic and the red plumes of his helmet. Fitful as the sunshine of the week had been, it had bronzed his face and robbed his hands of their whiteness. His moustache drooped with the damp, but his eyes were lighted with all the fires of excitement and of love, and she heard his loud cry of salutation even while she was asking herself if, indeed, he had come.

And so she ran to meet him, and holding her in his arm and whispering her name again and again, he crushed her pretty dress against the buttons of his tunic and covered her face with kisses, and seemed as though nevermore would he release her. In that moment she had her recompense for all the weary hours of waiting and distress.

CHAPTER IX

THE FUGITIVE

HE released her lips, but with fingers still locked in his he led her to the house and began to tell her all his news. She did not think it strange that he had no question concerning her own welfare during the days that had intervened. He had seen so much since then; the fires of war burnt him as a fever. She was content to listen and to know that she held his hand and heard his voice again.

“I have been twenty hours in the saddle, little one,” he said, “twenty hours upon a biscuit and a glass of white wine at an *auberge*. How good it is to get home again! *Ma foi!* it seems a hundred years. I cannot think that it is only twenty days — twenty days since we went to Niederbronn and you taught me to see that the leaves were green. If we had known that morning! And you said that you would be an old woman!”

“I should have been if you had not come back,” she exclaimed, speaking for the first time.

He put his arm about her and pressed her close to his heart again.

“It could not be,” he said decisively, “for me you are always the little girl of Strasburg I saw at the convent gate five years ago. And to-night — ah, if you could see yourself to-night, *chérie*.”

She flushed for pleasure of his words and opened the door of their little drawing-room.

“It has been a year of days, Edmond,” she said uncomplainingly, “yet I knew that you would come. And the roses have been ready every morning. Yesterday I would have ridden to Hagenau, but Jules Picard met me and said he had news of you. He has been very good to us. I rode with him to Niederbronn on Sunday. It was a dreadful day. They killed a German soldier — he died almost at my feet — ”

His merry laugh ran through the little house.

“How — you call it a dreadful day, Beatrix! A dreadful day because a Prussian was killed! What will you say when I tell you that at Saarbrück on Tuesday General Bataille killed four thousand of them? The tale is everywhere. It was a victory for the Emperor and the Prince. The Prussians ran like deer. They will run every day when we begin. And we shall begin to-morrow, *chérie*; to-morrow we go to the north.”

92 The Garden of Swords

She could see his spirit waxing hot at the very thought of it ; and his forgetfulness of all else but this consuming passion of the war was unmistakable from the first. He wished to hear of nothing, to speak of nothing but the troops of France then marching northward to their victory.

“ You shall tell me the story at dinner, *petite*,” he said. “ I have asked Chandellier and Giraud, and the Colonel himself may come. It is only for to-morrow, for we march again on Saturday. Duhesme is with us, and Michel ; Douay goes forward to Weissenburg. We shall be very strong when de Failly reports. He has two divisions at Bitche, and Frossard is before Saarbrück. We have the cuirassiers and the Turcos and ninety-six guns besides the mitrailleuse. That is the medicine for the Prussians — the mitrailleuse. You should hear the tales they tell of the Prince’s baptism. Whole regiments mowed down as wheat by the wind. Not a man left to go to Berlin and tell the others about it. It was a triumph, a procession. Those that could run were the lucky ones. Ah, *mignonne*, did I not promise you that before the vines had ripened I would be home again ? ”

She took both his hands and looked up into his face very seriously, as one whose love wished more for him even than his own ambitions.

“God grant it!” she ejaculated fervently.

He kissed her for the words, but could not spare any praise for her pretty room or for the roses with which she had decked out the mantel-piece and the little windows. His thoughts were all of his comrades who were coming to dinner at the chalet. He talked incessantly of all that had happened in Strasburg and upon the march afterwards.

“Old Héléne is at the Place Kleber,” he said; “she wants you back there, but I said that you would not go. There may be danger on the road, and while the army is about here you will be safe. We shall not leave the frontier until we ride to Berlin, and then I will write again. If it were not for those ‘others,’ Beatrix, I would take you with me. But our friends *là-bas* are merry fellows, and I do not wish you to meet the people who have come from Paris to our picnic. The Colonel says we have as many bonnet-boxes as waggons. It is his way of speaking, and, of course, soldiers are soldiers always. When the day comes, they will not fight less well because they know a pretty bonnet and a pretty face beneath it. I do not like that—but then, you know, I have someone to wait for me. Was it long to wait, *mignonne*—were you very lonely?”

She was glad that he should have asked the

question, though it came to him as an after-thought.

“I counted the hours,” she said, “yet I knew that it must be, Edmond!”

“Ah, the ‘must be’ will soon be a word of yesterday,” he said gaily; “you shall hear what the Colonel says, Beatrix. Giraud comes with him, but the Major is busy after horses, and Chandellier is to dine with Mademoiselle Serres of the Opéra Comique. You will hear her when we go to Paris in the autumn. She has come here to learn how Marguerite feels when Valentine has gone to the wars. It is a splendid idea, and Serres amuses me always. She has ridden with the regiment from Strasburg, and is now at the inn with the others. I am going down there by-and-by to arrange for to-morrow. If the Marshal is wise, he will not hurry us. The men are coming in every day, and we shall have our full numbers before the week is out. It does not matter, of course, for we have an army here that could fight all the Germans on the Rhine. And Saarbrück will have demoralised them. Our spirit is splendid. You do not know what magnificent fellows we lead, Beatrix. There are no finer troops in the world. I would risk the safety of France a hundred times with such men as our lancers at my back. I would stake my own life

on the victory which they will win if only those Prussians will make haste and show themselves. But they know better. They wait for us, and they will not wait long. It will be like a storm in summer, *petite* — a little darkness, and then the sunshine and my home !”

His mood was one which would brook no contradiction. Much as she wished to talk of many things, she saw that he would have no mind for them ; and she hid away those little secrets of her love which at any other time she would have whispered joyously. His hope and happiness were very dear to her ; and when by-and-by Colonel Tripard himself came to the house, and Lieutenant Giraud with him, she welcomed them as friends who could talk of things which were more fitting and momentous at such an hour. Simple as their dinner was, they had the music of the drums and the tramp of squadrons marching to make the music of a feast. And Edmond was at home again. The little house seemed full of bright lights as of the radiance of her own happiness. The watch-fires on the hills were the beacons of her happiness.

Colonel Tripard, a veteran soldier, with a pleasing voice and a gentle manner, spoke little but spoke well. Lieutenant Giraud, a *flâneur*

96 The Garden of Swords

without brains, babbled always of the victory at Saarbrück. Lefort himself was proud of the little wife who sat at the foot of his table — proud of her prettiness and of the gentle welcome she gave to his friends.

“I will not let her go back to Strasburg, my Colonel,” he said, when Saarbrück had been forgotten for an instant. “Am I not right? Is she not better with the army?”

“While you are here, yes. And the army should be grateful to you. But, of course, Madame will return when we are gone.”

“To tell them of your victory, Colonel. Is there any other reason?” Beatrix asked.

He curled his moustache, and shook his head thoughtfully.

“There will be many soldiers here, Madame Lefort. They are not always the friends of women. And we have the Algerians with us. They are splendid fellows, but —”

He shrugged his shoulders. A shadow of anxiety crossed her face.

“You are not going to say, ‘Save us from our friends,’ Colonel.”

Lieutenant Giraud chimed in :

“Save them from their friends’ wine cellars, Madame Lefort. That is what the Colonel would say. They are the devil, those Turcos. A plague

of locusts is better. If you have any wine in your cellars, give it to them and go out to the hills while they drink it. There will be nothing but empty bottles in Germany a month from now. They are always thirsty — the camels !”

Beatrix ignored him.

“There were Baden troopers here on Sunday,” she said quietly; “they paid for what they had and robbed none. If I am to run away, it must not be from the soldiers of France, Colonel.”

Lefort heard her with pleasure.

“She is right,” he said; “we will leave the Prussians to do the running, my Colonel. And this house is not upon the high-road. If a soldier comes here to ask for a glass of wine, he shall have one !”

“He is coming now, then,” exclaimed Giraud; “hark how the fellow gallops. You will have to look for a bucket for a rascal who rides like that.”

All listened for a moment and heard a dull heavy sound, as of the thunder of hoofs muted by the wet of the road, without. Some trooper was galloping towards Reichshofen, and galloping as though for his life. When he came up to the châlet he reined back his horse and began to shout like one possessed —

98 The Garden of Swords

"Save yourselves, save yourselves; the Prussians are coming."

The Colonel filled his glass and sipped it. The others looked at each other incredulously.

"The man is mad," said Giraud.

"Or drunk," said Tripard; "a gallop in the hills will do him good. *Apropos*, Captain, where does your road lead to? We have twenty maps of Germany *là-bas* but none of France. That is the way our people do things."

"They fear you will lose the road to Berlin, Colonel," suggested Beatrix; but Edmond said—

"It is the road to Reichshofen and Niederbronn. Those who join de Failly will go that way to-morrow, my Colonel. There is plenty of cover for an ambush if ever the Germans this way —"

"If the Germans —" ejaculated Giraud with irony that was almost indignation.

"They were here on Sunday, Monsieur Giraud," Beatrix said quietly.

The laugh was turned against the lieutenant, and they were still merry over it when a second trooper was heard galloping up the road. He rode feebly, as one upon a weary horse; and when he came to the garden gate they could hear him crying for help in a weak and trembling voice.

“Another,” said the lieutenant. “*Sacre bleu* — the whole regiment is drunk to-night, then.”

A little while they waited in silence, for Guillaumette ran to the door. She came bustling into the room presently with a white face and lips which could scarcely articulate her news.

“Monsieur, Monsieur,” she said wildly, “there is a man dying in the garden — come then !”

Her news was so unlooked for that all rose to their feet at once; but Edmond put his hand on his wife’s shoulder and held her back.

“It is nothing,” he said; “stay here, and we will see.”

He went into the hall with the two men at his heels. Through the open door there came a fresh wind of the night to set the candles guttering in their sticks and to blow petals from the roses she had picked. The empty chairs and the food still upon the plates seemed ominous, in some way, of disaster. She heard the men all talking together, and to their voices was added the moaning voice of a stranger. When she could restrain her impatience no longer and went a little way into the hall, she beheld a spectacle so terrible that she sickened before it and would have fallen if Edmond had not put his arm about her. One of the hussars of Douay’s brigade stood in the

100 The Garden of Swords

lobby; he had a great gash upon his face, and the clotted blood had stained his tunic a deep brown. The pitiful eyes of the man, his wan cheeks, his failing voice told her that death had ridden with him upon the road.

“Messieurs,” he said hoarsely, “it is a defeat — a rout at Weissenburg. The general is killed; the chasseurs are cut to pieces. I have ridden all day with Uhlans at my heels. Save yourselves, Messieurs, for they are coming here !”

He spoke with a sympathetic earnestness, as though their safety was of great concern to him; but the effort was too much for his strength, and of a sudden he put both hands upon his forehead and reeled forward among them.

“Oh, my God, Messieurs, what pain I have !” he cried.

The Colonel’s strong arm was about him in a moment.

“*Mon pauvre,*” he exclaimed, “you shall rest here—a glass of wine quick, Captain; he will tell us his story afterwards.”

Beatrix had stood mute in her distress while the man spoke; but now, when she heard his cry of pain, a woman’s instinct released her will, and she was first in the room for the wine they sought. When she had filled a glass of it and returned to the hall, the huzzar lay full length upon the

carpet, his hands still clasping his head as though to crush the pain of the mortal wound he carried.

“Here — here is the wine, Colonel.”

Tripard thrust her back gently.

“Not now,” he said. “His story is told, my child.”

CHAPTER X

WAITING

THEY carried the body of the dead hussar to the coach-house and laid it there upon a mattress, with candles set on either side of it. Death for France was new to them then. This man, whom night had sent to their doors, might have been one of their own servants stricken by some accident of farm or field. The day was to come when the dead would be no more to them than the blades of grass their horses trod. But that day was not yet.

Though they had hardly begun their dinner when the wounded man came to the door, no one thought now of food. Beatrix herself, white and silent, in her little drawing-room, heard them passing to and fro, now out to the gate to hear if other troopers rode that way; now to the stables to saddle their horses. Blank incredulity marked all their words. Abel Douay, the intrepid, ever-zealous Douay, surprised! His division cut to pieces — he who was to march by Weissenburg to their support on the morrow. They could not believe it. The troopers had been the victims

of some skirmish; they had fled in panic from some marauding Uhlans. In any case, those at the ch^âlet must ride down to headquarters to learn the truth. The very solitude of the Niederwald had become intolerable to them. Even Lefort had his excuses for the journey. His curiosity burned him as a fire.

“I shall not be away an hour, Beatrix,” he said. “It is necessary that I go. We shall send some troopers to see to that poor fellow yonder, and the Colonel will make this house his headquarters and have a sentry here. You must be brave, little one. I do not believe a word of the story, but it is for us to be prudent. If there are Germans at Weissenburg I must send my little wife to Strasburg, after all. I did not believe that it could happen so. I will not believe it until the news is confirmed down yonder.”

“You must not think of me, dearest,” she said quietly. “I shall not go back to Strasburg while you are here. If the worst happens, no one will trouble about the ch^âlet. You do not wish me to go — Edmond?”

“I — I wish it, Beatrix, God forbid! After all, the army is here, and that is enough. But I did not think that it would come to this. Germans at Weissenburg! How can they be there? Our vedettes rode over the very ground yesterday.

104 The Garden of Swords

They did not see a single trooper. They are not blind, and those others were not telling the truth. I shall come back in an hour and be sure of it. You will wait up for me — *mignonne!*”

His ideas were changing and strangely excited. In one moment he would speak of her safety, in the next of the orders for to-morrow. They were to follow Douay to the north; de Failly was coming down from Bitche; the Marshal was at Hagenau. There would be a great battle on the Sunday, and the Germans would be driven back far beyond the Rhine. That would be the beginning and the end of the war. MacMahon would march into Baden; the Emperor would enter Germany by Restall, and go straight to Berlin. There would be no more war in Europe for half a century. He would take her to Paris, and this trouble should make their holiday a holiday indeed.

It was nine o'clock when the three rode away from the châlet. In the aureole of light, cast out from the window of her drawing-room, she saw the anxious face of Colonel Tripard, the laughing eyes of Lieutenant Giraud, the restless haunting look which Edmond turned toward her. She heard their excited talk as they turned from the gate to the high-road, and went cantering down to Wörth. None of them looked back. The moon shone fitfully upon the dripping trees and puddles

in the lanes. She could see the candles guttering by the body of the dead man; far away she heard the rumble of waggons and the rolling of the drums. Guillaumette and a little group of farm servants discussed the terror of the night over there in the stables. A realisation, not of her own peril, but of her solitude, overwhelmed her. The presence of the dead haunted her. She ran up to her bedroom, and sitting in the unlighted room she opened her window and looked out over the awakened vineyards. France had poured its very life into that valley. Watchfires glowed red in the woods as a thousand stars of good omen. She could see regiments of cuirassiers with the moonbeams glowing upon their helmets and their breastplates while they march northward to the villages by the river. The brooks shone as rivulets of molten silver. The silence of the thickets about the house was weird and terrifying. She thought to see those woods quicken to life and pour from their heart the hosts of the enemy. The memory of the dead hussar's face was with her always.

She sat at the window of her room, and her strange life came back in many pictures of her childhood. She remembered her mother's face; there was, far back in the years, the dim recollection of another — of that father who had died

106 The Garden of Swords

in America and left her to become the child of France, and the wife of one of France's best soldiers. It was odd that in such an hour a memory of the gardens of her own England would trouble her and set her longing for them. The first fruits of her happiness had been garnered there. Nevertheless, the years she had lived in Strasburg had given her Edmond. It had been old H el ene's dearest wish always that "her children," as she called them, should be man and wife. Now that wish was realised — yet to what purpose? What irony of destiny had chosen this hour of the consummation of their love to put them asunder? If she had known nothing of the meaning of war until that day, the night of the day taught her generously. This outpouring of the sons of France, this fleeing of peasants to the mountains, these endless squadrons upon the high-road, this fever of life, this shutting of the doors upon the homes of France — this was war. She did not know the truth a month ago, but now she knew for all time. None the less, courage, her dead father's gift to her, was ready to console her for the knowledge. She was the wife of one of France's soldiers, she told herself. For his sake she would show a laughing face to all the world to-morrow. Yet, if he should die —! For the first time since the day of the ultimate calamity

she knelt at her bedside and sent a fervent prayer to heaven that God would give her the life of the man she loved.

In distant Normandy another woman prayed at the same hour for the hussar, who lay still and white between the guttering candles they had set up in the coach-house.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUSSARS ARE AT GUNSTETT

It fell wet upon the morrow, a heavy soaking rain, which quenched the watchfires and wet the shivering troopers to their very skins. All day long, weary infantrymen and gunners sleeping upon their guns came listlessly down the valley road; even the woodland heights were solitudes no more. Beatrix, worn with anxiety and waiting, saw the dark faces of the Algerians as they lurked about the garden gate and bandied words with the sentry who had been posted there. She beheld the aides-camp dashing wildly down toward the hollow or away to Reichshofen or Bitche. The ground trembled as the rolling guns were dragged upward to the heights. The horsemen, splashed from head to foot with mud, went by doggedly to their camp in the valley. A great sound, rising and falling, as the murmur of an angry sea, was heard all day, even in the thickets of the heights. The drenching rain could not check the sound, nor any door shut it out. The very air quivered with the echoes of turmoil and of movement. Men turned from camp to camp as though no place of rest was

The Hussars are at Gunstett 109

anywhere to be found. Peasants fled to remote glades of the mountains, with children clinging to their knees; women wept for the homes which would be homes to them no more.

It was nearly dark when Edmond returned to the *châlet*. The rain had soaked through his cloak, and his weary horse could scarce stand upon its legs. He met his child-wife at the gate and led her quickly to the house. She saw that the day had changed him strangely. He was thinking of something else even while he greeted her.

“The Colonel will not come,” he said. “He has gone to join de Faily. I am left at Wörth with a squadron. We have ridden all day on a reconnaissance towards Seltz, but there are no Germans there. God knows, I wish you were not here, *mignonne* — I blame myself, but how can you go now? There is not a road which is free — not any one to whom I can trust you. The troops come in every hour and the battle is for Sunday. My God — if it should be here!”

He stood for a moment holding both her hands and looking with earnest eyes upon her laughing face. The scarlet plumes drooped, wet and sodden, over the dulled brass of his *czapska*. The silver epaulettes were tarnished; there was mud even upon his tunic; but, more than all, his sunken cheeks and weary step spoke eloquently of his

110 The Garden of Swords

fatigue. A great pity for him came upon her, and she drew him into the brightly lighted room, and would not hear of his apprehensions.

“Dearest,” she said, “of course I shall not go away. As if it mattered. And Guillaumette is here. She has been giving wine to the troopers all day. When her Gaspard goes to Berlin he is to bring her a mug. There will be nothing to drink in Wörth by that time. We shall have to go to Paris or die of thirst. As if it were not enough to have you home again.”

She was talking and laughing all the time, and with deft fingers helping him to change his sodden clothes. She did not ask him if the news of yesterday were true, for she feared his answer to her question. Every effort of hers was one to remind him that he had come home again. The bright lights in her drawing-room, the fire Guillaumette quickly kindled there, the little dinner they had thought so much about, the hundred gestures of affection and of love compelled him to forget the grim scenes without. He shut them from his memory for a short hour, and thought only of the childish face lifted to his, of the days of happiness which the mountains had given to him.

“It is good to have you to myself, *mignonne*,” he said when dinner was done and she had rolled

The Hussars are at Gunstett 111

his cigarette, and lay curled up on the rug at his feet. "I feared that Tripard would come, and the others, but they are gone by to Bitche. Michel has all the cavalry he wants for anything we are likely to do here. There are the two cuirassier regiments under Bonnemain, and Septueil has the light brigade. You remember Septueil at Strasburg—the man who always told you that you were a Prussian at heart and would never marry a French soldier. He rode in to-day, and Duhesme is with him. I am sorry for the people down below—there are no more vineyards now, and you could not find an empty house in the villages if you offered ten thousand francs for it. I met old Mère Bartres as I was coming up. The Turcos have turned her out of the cottage with the little ones—she was going to sleep in the woods, but I sent her to the stables. We must do what we can for all these poor people now. If the worst comes to the worst and we are beaten—"

She laughed at him, and put her arms about his knees.

"If we are beaten, dear—ah! if the mountains fly. Who is coming to Wörth when the army is here, and you are here, and—I am here! The ride has tired you. I know what it is—oh, so well—to be tired with all the world, and to think

112 The Garden of Swords

that everything is against you, and that to-morrow will be the deluge. But when to-morrow comes you get up early, and the sun shines, and you forget what it was all about, and there is no deluge. I used to be like that often when I was at the convent in Strasburg. The bells were an enemy; I hated the old man who sat at the gate; but when the gate opened and old Héléne was there, and I went to the Place Kleber and saw you upon your horse, and all the lances of the regiment, and heard the music everywhere — I was glad that there had been those other days. If the sun shone every day, there would be no summer. And our summer is to come. It will not matter when or where — but we shall tell each other about to-night, and that will make the sun shine for us.”

She talked bravely, but her words were vain. That spirit of hope which had animated him yesterday was his friend no more. He was telling himself, though he whispered no word of it to her, that Douay had been defeated at Weissenburg, and that his division fled, panic-stricken, through the hills. The same army which had defeated Douay might be at the gates of Wörth to-morrow. What answer would MacMahon give to it — ah, what ?

“I do not fear for the men,” he said, when

The Hussars are at Gunstett 113

she had rolled him another cigarette, and he had listened a moment to the thunder of that mighty human avalanche in the valley below; "it is those who lead. Why do we want biscuit even here on our side of the frontier? Why are the magazines at Strasburg empty? Why does no one know anything of the Emperor's plans? They tell us that Douay was surprised, yet whose fault was that? There are no finer fellows than the troops down yonder in all the world. If they are beaten, then God help France and us!"

She refused to respond to his earnestness, and still wished to lead him to other thoughts.

"Oh! We are in the convent to-night," she exclaimed impulsively, "the bell will ring presently, and grandmère Hélène will come. Tomorrow there will be the feast, and I shall see the lances go by and hear the music. And Edmond will be there—he will have forgotten the deluge."

The note of it was jest, but she changed it on an impulse and spoke of her own great love for him.

"We have always ourselves, dearest," she said; "nothing can change us. There will always be our home—and our love."

There would always be her love! Ay, indeed, as he looked down upon the little face, and the

114 The Garden of Swords

watching eyes, and the pitiful mouth, down at the long hair falling upon his knees, and the white hands of the child-wife that destiny had sent to him, he said that love should ever be his recompense. And he slept with his arms about her and forgot that the enemies of France were upon the fields of France, and that to-morrow the dead would be numbered and many a home would mourn a son, and many a wife would listen for a voice she nevermore would hear.

At dawn a trooper, riding madly up from the camp, awoke him with an urgent message.

“The Prussians are in the town; the hussars are at Gunstett — for God’s sake come quickly, Captain — the battle is to-day!”



“ “ The Prussians are in the town ! ” ”

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BOOK II

Battle

CHAPTER XII

THE BLOOD-RED DAY OF WÖRTH

A FIGURE as of the blood-red day seemed to pass through the sleeping woods and to awaken them with a voice that terrified and a command which quickened the laggard's heart. Above the murmur of leaves and the babbling of the brooks the cry "*Aux armes!*" brought men staggering to their feet from the stupor of dreams now broken, from victories, perchance, that sleep had numbered. There was still the shivering woodland life, the dark places of the thickets, the merry splash of streams, the note of birds; but these were things apart. The herald of the breaking day had breathed upon the passions of those who slept; the rising sun shone upon the faces of fifty thousand whose pulses quickened already with the ferocity of combat. As fire leaping from brake to brake and dell to dell, that spirit of the battle moved. Children ran from it to their homes as before, the outposts of a spectre army. Women pressed babes to

116 The Garden of Swords

their breasts and prayed to the saints. From the height of Froeschweiler in the north to the marshy brookland by Gunstett in the south that thunder of the new day rolled. To arms! The very sky, in changing lights of crimson and of purple and of grey-black cloud, gave canopies of storm to the tumult that it looked upon.

To Beatrix, standing at the gate of the *châlet* as the night merged into day, the torrent of sounds was as some cataclysm which swept away all thought of self, of her own life and her own safety. She saw the things about her; she beheld men running wildly through the woods; she could have touched the mud-stained horses of the cuirassiers; the dark faces of the Africans looked into her own; the swinging, impetuous march of infantry delighted her — yet the meaning of these things, the reality of it all, the import of it was not realised. There stood her own little house with its girdle of tree and thicket; there below were the vineyards and the rivers. War and battle must be something far distant from the homes of these children that she knew. And Edmond! The jeopardy of her husband's life she dared not contemplate. An irony of fate which had given her this good measure of happiness that she might suffer through the years was not to be believed in.

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 117

Edmond had exhorted her to leave the ch[^]let instantly and ride westward to Saverne. It had been his last word to her as he lifted her to his saddle for a lover's farewell. She gave him half a promise ; and when he turned at the bend of the road to repeat his wish, her laughing face answered it. He did not see that other look, the tears lingering in the pretty eyes, the girl's true self written there in lines of grief untold. The road hid the aftermath of farewell from his sight. " We shall drive the Prussians to the Rhine, and you will see me to-night," he had said with a new courage of the morning. She knew not that many days of grief must pass before she heard his voice again, and that when he came back to her it would be to turn from her caress and to tell her that love was no more.

All her thought was of the moment ; of the awakening in the woods, of the news that the trooper had brought. The Germans were at Gunstett. Then there would be a battle beyond the river ! Men would die. A nation would hear of victory to-morrow. That mighty host of armed men, whose voice was the thunder of the hills, stood sentinel of the homes of France. She had a great pride in the thought that Edmond was one of those to whom the children looked so confidently. And he would return victorious at sun-

118 The Garden of Swords

set. The sword of France was drawn. It would never be sheathed until the honour of France was saved.

Day had not broken when the trooper waked them from their sleep, nor was the sun lifted above the hills when Edmond rode down to his regiment. She watched the spreading light while it showed her the rain-drops glistening upon the leaves, and the little pools which the showers of the night had filled again. After the first mad awakening a hush fell upon the forest; the flowers lifted their heads anew, the trembling leaves made their voices heard — it was the Niederwald of the old home, the Niederwald of solitude remote and the haven of rest. She lingered at the gate, hoping she knew not what. When Guillaumette came to tell her that the coffee was ready, she did not hear her. Her thoughts were away in Strasburg, at the altar of the Minster where her love-vow had been spoken.

“You called me, Guillaumette?”

“If I called you, Madame — when the coffee spoils and the bread is hot and the clock strikes six! —”

“Six o'clock — is it six o'clock? Then I have been here an hour, Guillaumette.”

A strange voice chimed in with the answer:

“To the tick, Madame. I have watched you

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 119

from my windows — it is impossible to look another way when Madame Lefort stands at her garden gate. And pardon me — I have said, ‘She is waiting for her pony; she is going to Saverne when that rascal Jacob is ready.’”

She turned to see old Jules Picard, snuff-box in hand, astride his great weedy horse. He had ridden up from the château at her husband’s request, and he began already to take fatherly possession of her.

“Madame,” he continued, shutting his golden box with a snap, “Guillaumette is right. We will take a cup of coffee and then we will ride to Saverne. Those fellows *là-bas* are going to fight. The glory will come afterwards. We shall return for that — you and I. There is always the glory for those who know how to come back. And we shall find Monsieur a colonel. I have just passed him on the road and told him so. ‘Madame and I are going to Saverne while you send those Prussians to the devil,’ I said. He is of my opinion. He has confidence in me, Monsieur *votre mari*. And Madame will share it. I have no doubt of it. She has ordered her pony already. She will give old Jules Picard a cup of coffee — and then, *en avant*. Oh, my child, what a cry is that when your back is towards the enemy and the guns are beyond the hills!”

120 The Garden of Swords

He climbed from his horse laboriously and stood beside her, his enormous sombrero hat in his hand. There was no braver man in France, and she knew it, but she laughed at his assumption of her assent and did not seek to hide that laughter from him.

"Come," she said, "we will have our coffee in the garden. We shall see the valley from there. And we can talk about Saverne afterwards. You will stay to *déjeuner*, Monsieur Picard?"

The old man raised his hands melodramatically.

"Madame," he asked, "do I hear you aright?"

"I hope so."

"And you will not ride to Saverne?"

"Not for all the soldiers in Prussia."

"Then God be praised for His mercies."

"You mean —"

"I mean, my child, that here is a brave heart, and wherever a brave heart beats there is the love of old Jules Picard."

He bent and kissed her hand. His bantering mood had passed. From the valley below there came the dull echoing roar of artillery. An aide-de-camp, with mud even upon his face, went by at a gallop, and disappeared in the hither wood. Some Turcos came down the hill at a double, crying to each other that the Prussians were crossing the river. In the wood at the bend of

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 121

the road they could distinguish between the trees the red trousers and blue coats of infantrymen. A bivouac had been broken up there. Fires still smoked, but the cooking-pots were overturned, and the grass trampled in the haste of assembly. A pair of horses drawing a battery caisson overpowered their driver and dashed blindly down the hill to the Strasburg road. The thunder of their hoofs was to be heard for a long time. Then silence fell again upon the thickets.

Old Jules Picard was gaily dressed that morning. A coat of dark blue carried the button of an order; his vest was in the old style, with embroidery upon it. He wore smart gaiters and white breeches; a diamond circlet sparkled about his cravat. The excitement that he suffered betrayed itself in gesture alone. He talked incessantly, that the others might share his confidence. And Beatrix, in her turn, listened to him wonderingly. This, then, was the day of battle! The unchanging forest seemed to mock the thought. The distant roar of the awakening artillery was as an echo of ill speaking beyond the river.

They took their coffee in the arbour of the roses. Looking down thence over the woods and the vineyards they could see the river at Gunstett, the mill in the marsh, the distant heights whereon the Prussians lurked, the white villages and the

122 The Garden of Swords

fields of maize. Everywhere the eye could find a panorama of wood and hill land. Such troops as were to be perceived appeared neither hasting nor active. A few puffs of smoke hung above the opposing heights. The horses of cavalry, even the sturdy figures of cuirassiers passed in and out between the trees. But there was no panoply of war — no charge and countercharge. The interval of waiting had come; the hush before the storm.

“Monsieur is *là-bas*, in the wood,” said old Picard, as Beatrix, with trembling hand, filled him a cup of coffee; “we shall see him presently, and he will take *déjeuner* with us. I do not account this a day of any importance. You were wise to remain, Madame — wise and brave.”

She smiled at his compliment.

“I am brave because there is no danger. You think that there is none, then, Monsieur Picard?”

There was a note of anxiety in the question which she could not hide from him. No moment spared her. A voice said always that Edmond might never return to the *châlet*.

Old Picard observed it and turned to banter again.

“I think it, Madame? — I think nothing. That is for the generals of France, who will begin presently. Why should I do their work when there

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 123

is good coffee at the Niederwald, and Madame Lefort is happy there? I am the man in the fauteuil. When the play begins I will applaud or hiss as the mood takes me."

He dipped his bread into the bowl and made a pretence of eating ravenously. But her own cup was unlifted. She gazed over the valley with eyes full of pity for France and her people, and the children of the woods.

"I cannot believe it," she said earnestly. "I cannot believe that men are to die to-day —"

"Do not think of it, my child. They die every day. Is our coffee less good for that? Ask Monsieur when he comes home to-night —"

She buried her face in her hands.

"God grant that he will come home, Monsieur Picard!"

The old man stood up and bared his head to the generous sunshine.

"Amen to that, my child — God save all dear to us."

For a little while there was silence between them, but anon, a thunderous report of cannon began to resound on their own side of the stream, and at the first discharge both rose to their feet. When the smoke from the guns had rolled away they could see the river again. Little dark figures, the figures of Bavarians, were on its banks now.

124 The Garden of Swords

All about the old mill in the marsh, puffs of white smoke were making clouds for the cloudless day.

Old Jules Picard watched the scene with devouring eyes. The lid of his snuff-box snapped incessantly.

“They are Prussians, my child,” he exclaimed; “they are crossing the river to kill those who defend our homes. Some of them will not go back. I count ten — eleven — twelve. Ah, one is up again! And it is at the mill, then. *Ma foi*, if my eyes were not so old!”

He stood quite still with his excitement for a moment, and then turned eagerly to her.

“It would be a mile from here where we could see it, Madame. A mile nearer to Monsieur, *votre mari*. He has forbidden it, but you may wish it. Ah, Madame, if you should wish it!”

A strange light filled her eyes. Woman that she was, a desire of battle was already in her heart. She would see Edmond’s victory. She would be nearer to him.

“Where you will,” she said quickly, “if only the day could end — now. If only one could know —”

He led her by the hand from the garden, and they brought her pony to the gate.

“I prescribe knowledge, Madame,” said he. “It is those who wait that suffer.”

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 125

Side by side the old man encouraging her, the girl very silent, yet with courage in her heart, they passed through the woods towards that height above the Sauer where the battle-field would reward them. For some way the thickets muffled all sounds to their ears. They met a regiment of the line marching quickly. Here and there in the woods infantry stood waiting; some busy with their rifles, some white with fear, some with prayers upon their lips. Artillery waggons thundered down the road to the valley. Where the woods were riven apart by gully and chasm the vineyards could be seen, green and golden in the sunlight. The roar of battle burst upon them in such moments. It was lost once more when again they entered the glade. And the path carried them upward now. They struck upon a woodland track so narrow that old Picard must follow her at hazard, complaining of his horse. At the end of it the thickets terminated abruptly in a little plateau of grass land. The battle-field of Wörth was before them. They looked down upon it as from a watch-tower of the heights.

The valley spread out below them as a golden river in the heart of the hills intensely green. They could see the town of Wörth, the river winding through it, the great outstanding mount at Froeschweiler. Villages stood up as little white

126 The Garden of Swords

pictures against the background of maize and vines. There were brooks and mills at the foot of the slope before them — but, everywhere along those miles of valley road, the blue tunics and the red breeches of the soldiers of France were visible. Now dashing forward at the charge; now deploying and seeking the shelter of mound and hill; now marching through the villages; those little blue and red figures were as men that moved upon some mighty board. Impossible to believe that they were to slay and be slain; that the destinies of a nation followed the puffs of white smoke and the concatenation of terrible sounds which marked their path. For those upon the heights, distance put a mask upon the face of death. The girl's heart beat fast, but it was with hope. The eyes of the old man were lighted as the eyes of an animal which hunts its prey.

“Did not I say that I prescribed knowledge, Madame?” he cried, pointing joyfully with his lean finger to the spectacle below; “and here is the medicine. Look well at it, for you will never see its like. The army of France — it is there. The glory of France — it is there also. You cannot understand that, my child, you who are not a Frenchwoman. You do not know why an old man's cheeks are red. *Ma foi* — that I must sit here — I, whose father was at Jena.”

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 127

She did not hear him. There was a hard expression upon her face very foreign to it.

“Where is the cavalry?” she asked. “Where is Edmond?”

He pointed southward to a thicket distant from them a mile or more.

“Lartigue is there with the eighth and ninth cuirassiers and two squadrons of the lancers. Your husband is with him, be sure of it. He could not find a safer place. There will be nothing for him to do to-day. Look how those black fellows run. *Ma foi!* — they are crossing the river again — those that have the legs. They fall like the trees — I count fifty. Ah, what a thing to tell your children, Madame, that the Prussians ran at Wörth.”

She had been looking at the wood wherein the lancers stood, but now she turned, and down at the valley's heart the spectacle rewarded her. A great veil of smoke was lifted from the mill in the marsh, and beneath it she beheld the red and blue line advancing and still advancing, while black figures were seen to stumble and to fall, and the roar of the guns upon the height was as a crash of doom. A surpassing joy of the glory of France came to her. These men who advanced with terrible cries and bayonets brandished, they were driving the enemy from the place where

128 The Garden of Swords

Edmond stood. She cared not that dead and dying lay in their path. The faint cries of ultimate agony which were heard at the watching-place were nothing to her. Edmond was not there. The victory was being won. He would come back to her.

Old Jules Picard talked always, but she did not listen to him. The wavering lines, retreating, advancing, fascinated her beyond any spectacle she had ever beheld. A battery of artillery, crashing through the wood behind them, seemed a new tribute to the glory of her new country. She did not quail when the guns belched flame and the shot hurtled toward the distant hills. The answering note from the German guns beyond the Sauer inspired her to an emotion as of defiance. A shell of theirs cutting the branches of a tree and sending a shower of brown leaves upon her pony left her with flaming cheeks and laughter in her eyes.

“They run away — they run from Wörth,” she cried delightedly, “and they are firing at us! Is it not splendid, Monsieur Picard? Do you not understand now why men can say that war is a noble thing? Oh, I do. If one could remember the children and the homes of France and forget everything else. Who could be a coward then?”

The Blood-Red Day of Wörth 129

She sat with glistening eyes and fast-beating heart, and he applauded her.

“Ah,” he said, “if it were the children of France and not the adventurers! If one were quite sure that the Prussians ran, Madame.”

“But I see them!”

“As the tide of the sea, my child — now a little way receding, now surging again; but the tenth wave, that is the fellow. Look well at Wörth and tell me what you make of it. Those black helmets were beyond the river an hour ago. Now they are coming through the vineyards — they creep up inch by inch; the dead lie thick, but the living do not heed them. Is the battle won because our soldiers are brave, because there are blue coats and red breeches in the valleys? Ah! — if the wish could help us.”

A strange gloom took possession of him. He sat very still upon his horse, and she, in turn, began for the first time to experience a vague doubt which she had not known before, even when Edmond left her at the chalet. How, indeed, if a nation should rejoice upon a victory to-morrow and that nation should not be France? How, if the Prussians really were creeping up those declivities towards the woods and her home? The belching guns, which made the earth tremble about her, were no longer living forces for the

130 The Garden of Swords

glory of her country. She began to fear them. She started when a spent bullet brought down a branch from the tree beside her. She was conscious of danger, and it appalled her.

“Monsieur Picard,” she said, “let us go — I believe I am afraid.”

He awoke from his lethargy.

“You are right to be afraid, my child; nevertheless — ”

He half wheeled his horse and then turned him back again.

“Nevertheless, Madame, there is Captain Lefort with his regiment. They are about to charge. Do you wish to go now?”

She did not speak. An icy chill crept over her. She feared to look, yet dare not turn her eyes away. The ambulance passed close by her, with a wounded gunner, his breast open and bleeding, to be seen in the winding sheet. A great pity for the man brought tears to her eyes. If they should carry her lover as that brave fellow was being carried!

Trumpets were blaring then in the valley below. It was the crisis of the day. The cuirassiers, and with them the squadrons of the lancers, rode out from the shelter of the woods to charge the Prussians who were swarming in the gardens above the villages.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEATH RIDE

GENERAL MICHEL had been in the woods of the Niederwald since dawn. Two regiments of cuirassiers were at his command, and those squadrons of lancers which Tripard had left for scouting duty. The General did not doubt that all the work he would have to do would be to engage the few daring hussars who had appeared above the village of Gunstett and thence opened fire on the valley land below. Imitating MacMahon, his chief, he believed that the army of the Vosges had encountered no other enemy than the outposts of the Crown Prince's army. The day undeceived him, but not until twelve o'clock had struck and the sun was hot upon the vineyards.

All morning the troopers were in the saddle waiting. Around them the overturned pans and scattered fires spoke of breakfast interrupted and of hunger continuing. Their *moral* was beyond question. They asked only that they might charge those spiked helmets and drive them

132 The Garden of Swords

across the Rhine. They thought that no infantry the world had ever seen could withstand the cuirassiers of France. The lesson to be learned was bitter — the first of many they must master.

It was just light when Lefort joined his men, and found the laughing Giraud full of the good news, and of those promises of hope which youth can give abundantly. The boyish voice and unquestioning belief were a tonic of the morning. His own night had been such a night of foreboding. Fear for France and for his child-wife at the ch^âlet had pursued him even in his sleep. But here, in the green wood, with the big fellows on their fine horses; here, where the helmets shone like gold and the chargers pawed the glistening grass, and all the talk was of victory, he drank in a great draught of courage, and remembered the purpose of his life, and all that his life's task demanded of him. Those friends of his, they would drive the Prussians to the Rhine! Beatrix would go to Saverne with old Jules Picard and Jacob. He would write to her that night and tell her of the victory. And Giraud gave him such a welcome:

“ Ah, Captain — you come, then, in good time. And Madame, she is up there still? Well, it is good to fight like that. She will stay, of course!

She does not fear all the hussars in Germany — she told me so. If only those others were like her! But they run—they have been running since yesterday, the sheep. There is not a woman in Gunstett now. Have you breakfasted, Captain?”

A trooper took his horse, and Lefort began to pace the wood with the lieutenant. The cuirassiers were all about, figures of white and gold against the ripe green of the leaves. Rifle shots crepitated in the distance. There was a loom of smoke above Gunstett, and those with strong eyes could distinguish the black figures of the Prussians, or count the daring Uhlans who rode out upon the heights to scan the opposing camps.

“The outposts of the eleventh, Captain,” exclaimed Giraud impulsively, as he pointed to the figures on the hills; “we must have missed them when we rode out yesterday. The General speaks of the heads of columns, and he is right. There will be no army corps here to-day. They say that the Bavarians are in force at Görsdorf, but Ducrot is there and Raoult holds Froeschweiler. It will be a strong division which takes Froeschweiler! Look at the slopes of it. And the engineers have been at work. If the battle must be, to-day is our time. We shall find no better

134 The Garden of Swords

position. And we have sixty thousand men in the hills."

"I doubt that," said Lefort quickly. "We were short in Strasburg, and our numbers cannot have been completed here. Why do the gunners not begin? The men are falling yonder; look at the ambulances, busy already. It is a good position, certainly, for those who defend. But why are we the defenders always? It was so at Weissenburg, they tell me. You cannot keep up the *moral* of troops who must always stand for targets. Believe me, Giraud, I cannot help seeing these things. No man, who is not blind, can fail to see that we have neither the men nor the generals to do any of those things which France is asking us to do."

The lieutenant, his oldest friend, laid his hand upon his arm in a gesture of affection.

"*Mon ami*," he said, "if it is as you say, our work is to alter it. But is it? I repeat, look at Froeschweiler. You could hold it against a nation. When the time for advance comes, it will be the cavalry who will send the answer to Paris. I know well how you feel this morning. Madame is up there in your home. You will go back to-night to tell her all about it. She can see Froeschweiler almost from your gardens. She will count the Prussians who die. Let us go

and breakfast and pledge her in a bottle of champagne. I have two on my holsters now. There is nothing like champagne when you feel that way. I know it — and I have not a little wife waiting for me.”

The hard expression passed from the face of Lefort.

“Confess,” he said, “how many wait in Paris, Giraud — to how many did you write yesterday?”

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders.

“Come, then,” he said, “why do we fight if it is not to tell those others about it? Applause is the food of glory — I do not want to grow thin. Let us breakfast, *mon ami*, and drink to all the pretty ones in France.”

The lancers were bivouacked almost upon the north-west edge of the wood. Lefort, having exchanged cheery words with the men of his own company, sat down upon a log beneath a vast chestnut tree and took the biscuits and the wine his young comrade offered generously. Away upon his left hand was the steep hill of Froeschweiler, its wooded slopes running down sharply toward the town of Wörth. He could see Raoul's brigade already busy upon it; the blue tunics and the red breeches of infantry soldiers flashed beneath the trees; even the quaint uniforms of the zouaves,

136 The Garden of Swords

and the black Turcos, were to be seen. From the extreme north there came an echo of rifle shots, even of artillery; and it was there, Giraud said, that Ducrot was driving back the Bavarians. Fitfully, indeed, along the whole line of the valley, the firing was now sustained. Yet few fell. Lefort believed with an effort only that this was battle, this the working of a nation's destiny.

“Look,” he said, “how odd it is! A strip of valley land, vineyards and villages in the sunlight, the birds still singing in the woods, who knows, even the labourer in the fields. And yet to-morrow all Europe will hear of it. A great battle will have been fought. We are fighting it now. Men are looking at the sky who will never see another sun. Do you realise it yourself, Giraud; do you understand it all?”

“I, Captain? I realise nothing except that the champagne is good. Men must die, it is true, but will they die less well because I am thirsty? *Nom d'un chien*, let us wait until our time comes, and then remember that it is for France.”

He lifted the glass to his lips, but set it down again quickly. One of the lancers, who had been leading a troop horse, turned suddenly with a sharp cry on his lips and came quickly toward them. A curious pallor, tinged with green, spread over his

face. He pressed his hand to his head, and a crimson stain dyed his fingers.

“Monsieur,” he said very quietly, “they have killed me.”

There were three men at his side in a moment, but, even as they stooped over him, a shell hurtled through the trees and pitched in the very centre of the bivouac. For an instant Lefort beheld a leaping flame of crimson fire. He saw horses rearing upon their haunches; heard cries of agony; was conscious of a ringing sensation in his ears as though someone were beating a drum there. Then an acrid taste of gunpowder filled his mouth; he could not see for the blinding smoke; he pressed his hands to his eyes, which pained him intolerably. When Giraud spoke to him the voice came as from afar.

“You are all right, Captain?”

“Yes; and you?”

“I don’t know — I seem to have only one hand. Where is the ambulance? You are going to fall back, of course? How those devils fire! And we are silent. What folly!”

He babbled incessantly, while the loom of smoke lifted and showed them the death it had cloaked. Three of the troopers lay prone at their feet. A horse, pawing the ground in agony, turned to them pitiful eyes. One of the sergeants

138 The Garden of Swords

of Lefort's company ran up and down with blood upon his tunic. Others of the horses were galloping, blind with terror, up and down the glade. Lieutenant Giraud hugged his left arm—there were tears of rage and pain in his eyes. They had shot away his hand.

“What pain! what pain!” he cried, as a child that is hurt. “I am maimed for life, Captain. At the beginning, too. Oh, my God, where is the ambulance?”

He ran to and fro as one distracted, and fell anon in a dead faint. Lefort, stupefied for a moment, began to remember his duty. This was battle, then—these agonising cries, this maiming of youth and courage, these eyes looking to his so pitifully. And he must face these things that his country might be saved. In that moment he awoke to the spirit of combat. He forgot even the child-wife waiting on the distant hills for him who had taught her the meaning of love.

The ambulance entered the wood now, and Giraud was the first to be lifted on it. He lay as one asleep, his mangled hand nursed as a babe nurses a little wounded limb. Lefort bent over him. He wondered how many of his friends would sleep like that before the sun set. And he himself—would he see the dawn again, the home he loved, or her who had made it a home

to him? A burning hatred of those who had made the war steeled his heart to action and to courage. He would fight for his little wife — for the homes of France and the children waiting there.

The cavalry fell back into the heart of the wood, but, without, the sounds of battle magnified and came nearer. Bullets sang among the trees always. Shells came hurtling over the thickets, or fell in the open places of the vineyards. A little while, and men laughed at those fellows. You could see them afar, black specks, as comets, with tails of steam, hissing through the air. The bullets were more to be feared, the song of death wailing in flight, the unseen blow ending in a gasp and a stagger and a crimson stain upon the earth. And the delay was intolerable to those troops of horsemen who must be spectators while their comrades fell in the open places of the fields and marsh lands. Brave horses pawed the ground or became restive at the thunder of sounds. Old troopers, who had been in Africa, and had won triumphs at Masena, shrugged their shoulders and asked what sort of a general that was who forgot his cavalry. They watched the batteries spitting fire from the trenches below them and mocked the spectacle. Every aide-de-camp galloping by, every driver of

140 The Garden of Swords

a waggon who passed them was followed by a hundred questions.

“How goes it, comrade? Do they fall back? When are we to ride?”

Lefort heard the questions of his fellows and did not rebuke them. He shared their impatience. Sitting there idly upon his horse with that old fire-eater Captain Quirat by his side, he thought how odd it was to see those glittering ranks of motionless troopers and to know that men were falling by thousands in the vineyards below. What held them back? The Prussians were in the villages now. Those cursed guns were putting a girdle of fire about the heights. Was this the victory of which an aide-de-camp, dashing up to Froeschweiler, spoke as he went by? The very word seemed an irony.

“What a tale,” he said to Quirat savagely; “we hold them at all points. How does Morsbronn burn them? And look at the mill. We had it an hour ago. Where are our fellows now?”

Quirat pulled his long moustache fiercely.

“The men are saying that von Kirchback is through Wörth with the fifth corps. That would be the eleventh corps yonder. We are fighting the heads of columns, *mon ami*—two hundred thousand men if I have any eyes to see. Why do we sit here like fools? Is the



“Sitting there . . . with that old fire-eater Captain Quirat
by his side.”

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cavalry for an autumn manœuvre, then? It's nonsense to hear them. A charge would settle it; but we are more ornamental. We shall remain in this wood to applaud when the Germans ride through to Paris."

Lefort took a cigar from his case and lighted it.

"If we were at the opera, I would say bravo," he exclaimed ironically. "As we are not, we must count our fingers until the time comes. There is plenty to see, at least. They are burning the farmhouse now to amuse the poor fellows up in the wood. *Ma foi*, what flames! If the weather were not so hot, the farmer could warm himself at his own fireside. As it is, he is probably saying to himself that the army knows how to protect the people. You let the Prussians burn their houses, Quirat, and then they have no anxieties."

A great white farmhouse, the Albrechtshäuser, situated upon the edge of the wood, burst into flames as he spoke. Smoke curled above its thatch; tongues of fire licked its gables, and spread from barn to barn and rick to rick. All about the house the shrieks of the dying were to be heard. Red breeches and blue gave colour to every yard. Bayonets flashed in the sunlight; the spiked helmets were everywhere. Foot by foot the Prussians drove those others before

142 The Garden of Swords

them. The din of battle, resounding as a crash of thunder, mingled with voices of woe and cries of agony and the blaring of trumpets and the baying of the guns. Through the whole length of the valley the French were retreating. Up the rugged slopes, leaping from trench to trench, *Vorwärts*, their song of battle, on their lips, von Werder's men came on. It was the culminating hour. The cavalry would wait idling no longer.

The command came to the woods when the Prussians were already in the outstanding thickets. Lefort heard it, and scarce believed his ears. They were to charge then! They must drive those spiked helmets from the vineyards or their own right would be turned. He rode up to his troops and spoke a good word of encouragement. It was odd to draw his sword for the first time in earnest and to know that he must kill wherever the enemies of France were to be seen. The danger of the charge was never in his thoughts. It was dreadful ground; the obstacles were many—but for this day all his life had been the school.

“We go to save our comrades down yonder,” he said. “You will win honour for us, *mes enfants*—for me and for France. You will remember our fathers who fought at Jena!”

The Death Ride 143

Ringling cheers greeted his words. At last, at last, the weary hours of waiting were done with. The woods quickened to the awakening impulses. A fever of excitement lighted eyes dull and savage with delay. The breastplates of the cuirassiers glittered as the golden shields of a mighty host, moving apace in the sunshine. *En avant! En avant!* The bugle's blast was as some call to judgment and to victory. Onward — if to death, it mattered not. Onward — it was good to be out there where the bullets fell as hail and the shells dug graves for the living. Onward — for the sake of France, if you wished it so; for the sake of movement and of life, as the dull truth went.

In columns of squadrons, the eighth cuirassiers leading, the ninth following, the lancers last of all, General Michel led his brigade through the stubble of the wood to the steeper slopes beyond it. From shadow they passed to the glare of the fuller day. Whatever quaking hearts the white tunics covered, no sign there was of hesitation or of delay. The troopers were to charge those Prussians and to send them back across the river. Prayer, death, the morrow — Lefort himself had no thought for any of them. He seemed to pass through some door to a mighty amphitheatre beyond. The thunder of battle

144 The Garden of Swords

crashed in his ears. His horse stumbled over the terrible ground, leaped the trenches, snorted with the delight of it — yet never faltered. Hills and valleys, crested helmets, golden trappings, houses aflame, rivers glistening in the sun's rays — he saw them all as things far off. The very danger was a delight inexplicable. Down and yet down into the very pit of death. Onward — over the living and the dead.

As the slopes became steeper, so the ferocity of that death-ride was the greater. Men and horses fell together in blinding clouds of dust. Troopers hung limp from their stirrups; blood gushed from their mouths and ears. Or stiff figures, with swords upraised, sat rigidly in their saddles, where Death had chained them sardonically. The trail they left was a trail of mangled beasts and men — a trail of glittering cuirasses and battered helmets and bloody shapes. The living knew nothing of it. They swept on in a delirium of slaughter. "For France," they said. Yet France was far from their thoughts. Life — for that their hunger was.

Out into the sunny fields, over the ripened crops, into the mazes of the vineyards, downward always toward the shimmering river and the valley's heart. The Prussians heard their cheers and answered them with rifles at their shoulders

The Death Ride 145

and bayonets fixed. Coiled as black snakes behind every sheltering furrow or outstanding ridge, they were there to prove that the glorious cavalry of France was invincible no more. It mattered not that lances cleaved the hearts of some; that swords struck upturned faces; that screams of pain and rage followed the horses' path. The rifle would avenge their comrades. The mighty human cataract pouring about them did not envelop or dismay them. Even the coward forgot his cowardice and struck a blow for his very life. The lowliest trooper among them remembered the General's word, "I must do my duty." Behind him lay the Fatherland. The cities of France were beyond the hills — the goal of victory and of duty vindicated.

Into the death-pit Lefort rode; sword in hand, a cry that was almost incoherent upon his lips. He saw the shimmer of the light, the burning houses, the black figures in the grass; but of his own acts he carried no memory. Once he remembered asking himself what Beatrix was doing at that moment — but all thoughts of her were far from him when, at length, the woods were passed and the great shock of encounter fired his very heart with all the impulse of deed and of desire. To slay! He had no other wish but that. To slash the life from the upturned

146 The Garden of Swords

faces, to hack and cut, to strike a good blow for France, to avenge the dead upon the hills. Bayonets glistened at his very breast, the smoke of the rifles enveloped him, the acrid taste of gunpowder was in his mouth always. He knew not what power enabled him to ignore these things. A madness of the death-ride possessed him. The thunder of his horse's hoofs was as a melody recurring again and again or singing in his ears defiantly. He was aware that half his men lay dead on the slopes behind him; he understood that General Michel's great attack had failed and that the chosen cavalry of France had been annihilated that day. But still he rode on. There was neither wish nor thought to regain the shelter of his own camp. The Prussians lay before him. His way lay there to the guns upon the heights. Fatigue intolerable could not tighten his hand upon the rein. He had no longer the power to lift his sword.

When the sun set, a regiment of Prussian hussars, riding through the hills of Baden, found him alone upon the road, far from Wörth and the battle there. He sat with haggard face and dizzy head and tears upon his cheeks beside the horse which never more would hear his voice or stretch its neck at his caress.

The Death Ride 147

“Messieurs,” he said to them pitifully, “if you could save my horse —?”

The troopers nodded their heads significantly. One of them, with a good heart, put a flask of brandy to his lips.

“Come,” he said, “you will catch cold here, Monsieur, and your horse is dead.”

CHAPTER XIV

NIGHT

NIGHT fell upon the field of Wörth, upon the bloody scenes and the upturned faces of the dead, and all the horrid sights of woe and desolation ! Through the dark places of the hills the French were flying to Saverne ; or even southward to the city of Strasburg itself. In the valley, where at dawn the whole glory of the day had shone, the wounded cried for succour and for death. Burning villages, beacon-fires, the lanterns of the human vultures gave light for the hour. A mighty host crossed the mountains, cavalrymen on foot, infantry upon horses, peasants mad with fear — the pursuing Uhlans everywhere.

Beatrice heard the murmur of retreat ; she did not quail before it. All her friends were fleeing from the doomed city ; but she remained. Down there by the river where the vanquished had fallen, she searched, lantern in hand, for the body of her lover. Never once did she doubt that he was dead. She had watched the glittering horsemen as they rode from the woods ; she had seen them fall as corn before the sickle.

There could be no hope that Edmond lived, they told her. Above, on the heights, the home which was dear to her sent tongues of flame to illumine the darkness of the woods wherein her love-dream had been given. The Prussians had burned it. She had seen Frenchmen dead in the rooms of her house; she had listened to the fierce shouts of anger and of despair when the Prussians came up through the woods and drove their enemies before them. The stress of battle had closed about her with a mighty roar as of some stupendous storm raging in the hills. Hidden in a dark place, the trembling Guillaumette at her side, she had waited and had watched for help and for the tidings. But old Jules Picard, who had ridden down toward Wörth at sunset, returned no more. The day had willed the death even of this bent old man, she thought.

“They will not harm old Jules Picard, Madame,” he had said. “I shall go to Morsbronn and bring the news. Those fellows do not shoot there any longer. The Captain will come back with me. He is down there somewhere; be sure of it. In one hour, in two, we will return — together. *Ma foi*, there is little life in this old body. Why should the Prussians want what is left? There will be dead enough to count by-and-by. Run

150 The Garden of Swords

to the woods, my child, and wait for me. It will not be long."

He went away as though his were the lightest errand in the world ; but he did not deceive himself, and he said that Edmond Lefort must lie with those others, the cuirassiers, who nevermore would see the sun or hear a comrade's voice. His real mission was to go up to the great château on the hill, the home of the Count of Durckheim, and to ask if any shelter were possible there for the girl-wife Lefort had entrusted to his keeping. Well he knew what the roads to Strasburg or to Saverne would be like that night. The maddened, despair-driven, flying hosts ; the rolling waggons, the plunging horses ; the throngs of fugitives become as devils — what hope for any woman abroad on such a journey ? Far better that she should wait in her own woods. The storm would blow over to-morrow. All report said that the Germans knew how to treat the women of France.

In the shadow of the woods Beatrix watched the advancing Prussians as they drove the French from the thickets and came upward, ever upward toward her home. She saw them in the sacred rooms of her own house ; she was a witness of the last fierce onslaught when the Turcos fell in heaps before the arbour she had loved and the



“The Turcos fell in heaps before the arbour.”

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flames burst from those very windows which had shown her the white villages and the havens of silence. Some terrible judgment of God seemed to have fallen upon her. It was as though a sea of fire surged about her, lapping her with molten ripple, tossing in upon its terrible waves the bloody victims of war and passion. Ever in her ears a voice said: "He is dead; Edmond is dead." She did not complain; she did not move from her watching place. She thought that surely she must die in the woods; that her eyes must be for ever closed to the terror of those sights and sounds; that in death she would hear her lover's voice again.

At sunset the wave of battle was broken; the thunder of the human surf beat upon the distant villages, upon the remoter passes of the Vosges. There were Prussians everywhere; but such of the soldiers of France as remained were mute and heartbroken prisoners. Lights began to shine on the slopes now; she heard strange voices singing the *Wacht am Rhein*, or the hymn which Luther wrote. German troopers went by at the gallop; but there were Prussians no longer at the châlet. The silence helped her to recollection. She crept from her hiding place, holding Guillaumette's hand; and the greater truth of the night began to be known to her.

152 The Garden of Swords

“Oh, my God,” she said, “where shall we find a friend to-night, Guillaumette?”

Guillaumette, afraid no longer since the storm of battle had passed, began to play the better part.

“Ah,” she exclaimed, “if Monsieur had sent a man to us and not a bundle of bones upon a silly horse! What is the good of an old rat like that when the Prussians come? *Ma foi!* it would have been different if Gaspard were here! Do not cry for the house, Madame. We shall build another when the spring comes — and Monsieur will be back again. He will come to-night. I should not wonder — ah, Madame, if there were not tears in your eyes!”

She clasped her hands; her own tears fell for the house which was but ashes, for the garden where the roses had bloomed; for all that had made their home.

“Oh, the animals — to destroy our roses, Madame, to burn our house! As if it were our word which made the war! But Monsieur will come back. Oh, God, send him back to us this very night!”

They stood together, brave women looking for the first time upon the face of war; and all the pity of war was in their hearts. A flicker of flame still played about the ruins of their house;

the odour of burning wood and cloth was intolerable. In the left wing, where her boudoir had been, Beatrix could see the pictures shrivelled in their frames ; the open piano black and scarred ; even burnt paper upon the writing table. Elsewhere all had fallen. The garden was a muddy swamp. The horses were gone from the stables. Old Jacob had fled to Niederbronn at the dawn of the day. They stood alone, and all the dreadful omen of the night was about them.

“ We shall sleep in the woods, Madame — to-morrow Monsieur will come ! Ah, if he should come to-morrow, and the news should be good, and we should go to Strasburg with him ! Who could harm us in Strasburg, where the great guns roar, and the great forts rise up, and the soldiers are everywhere ? *Sainte Vierge* — what a dream to dream ! No Germans, no cannon, no hunger — are you not very hungry, dear Madame ? ”

Beatrix answered as one who speaks in sleep.

“ I am not hungry, Guillaumette,” she said. “ Monsieur will not come to-night. He is in Wörth. We are going to meet him. You will get a lantern and come with me. None will harm us. Are you afraid, Guillaumette ? ”

“ Afraid ? I — Madame ? Afraid of the *vilains Prusses*. As if one could be afraid ! But we shall not go to-night. We are hungry, and we will beg

154 The Garden of Swords

our supper somewhere. Ah, Madame, the pity of it — our beautiful house — our home !”

Beatrix did not heed her. Her eyes were dry. Her lips burned as the lips of one in a fever. A fixed idea was in her mind. She would find Edmond. She would seek him down there where the dead slept in the heart of the vineyards. He might be lying wounded and waiting for her, she thought. She could imagine his upturned face, his vigil of suffering, the kisses with which she would nurse him back to life again. A woman's deepest sympathy, the sympathy of love, quickened her resolution. She was angry in her impatience.

“Why do we wait, Guillaumette? Why do we stand here when Monsieur is expecting us? We cannot save the house now. There are lanterns in the stable — oh, my God, if we should be too late !”

She drew her cloak close about her head and went quickly towards the ruins of the house. Guillaumette, watching her for a moment, dried up her tears. After all, there were men down there at Wörth, and someone would give them supper.

“I will find the lantern, Madame — do not dirty your beautiful shoes. There are Prussians down yonder — the animals. And you are brave,

Madame — oh, so brave. If those others had been like you!”

She babbled on, taking a lantern from the shelf of the tottering stables and groping for matches there. In its way, the dreadful day had been welcome to her as the changing event of an unchanging life. She had a terrible fear of the woods, and she held her mistress's hand when they began to go down towards the village, and the darkness of the thickets closed about their path. What sights that forest cloaked! A cry escaped her lips when the lantern showed her a Bavarian trooper sitting with his back against a tree, but quite dead in spite of the ghastly laugh about his lips. The bodies were everywhere. She saw in fancy the spirits of the dead hovering above the place of battle. The moan of a wounded chasseur, who crawled upon his hands and knees towards them, was a wail as of some evil thing hidden in the brake. She had no pity for the man. She craved for light — the lights of a city, the voices of men.

Beatrix passed through the woods unconscious of their secrets. She went on with eyes half closed and lips compressed. Edmond was waiting for her in the vineyards where the dead lay. She did not see the terrible figures of the brake, the dying, or those that followed, ghoul-like, the path

156 The Garden of Swords

of the destroyer. Once, indeed, a man with bloody hands and the eyes of a hawk sprang up from the path before her and disappeared into the undergrowth, believing that men and not women came to watch him. The face of the man made her heart stand still. She stepped back as one who had seen a figure from the very pit of hell. Guillaumette had fallen upon her knees to sob an hysterical prayer.

“*Sainte Vierge* — what sights! Oh, God help us, Madame. Did you see the man? Did you see his face? There was blood upon it. I cannot go on. You will not leave me alone here — Jesus help me — I cannot go.”

Beatrix took her hand and dragged her up.

“Come,” she said, “Monsieur is waiting for us in the vineyards. Who will harm two women? Do you not hear the soldiers, Guillaumette?”

A strange sound, the echo of guttural voices raised in merriment, came to them from the copse below. Men were singing a weird song of victory; lights danced in the interstices of the trees — cheering was heard, and the excited exclamations of the masqueraders. It would be the Prussians rejoicing by some bivouac fire, Beatrix thought. They would respect her errand. Even the trembling Guillaumette took heart when she knew that there were soldiers there.

“The *vilains Prusses*, Madame — hark to them,” she cried, forgetting her tears in a moment, “they have the voices of pigs, Madame. And they will give us supper, perhaps. Ah, if there should be supper there —”

She stumbled on, and at the turn of the road they beheld the bivouac and the watch-fire burning brightly. A regiment of Uhlans made merry there; and never did troopers wear a uniform so strange. For these were the hussars who had broken open the baggage of the great MacMahon himself — strange baggage for a man and for those who followed the man. Dainty corsets were there, and hose of silk, and gowns which famous costumiers had made, and little white shoes of satin and bows of many hues, and even bonnets with gay feathers in them. The Uhlans, half drunk with the excitement of victory, greeted the treasures hilariously. Some of them had put on the cap of “Madame”; some wore the rustling skirts spangled with fine embroidery; some capered in the hats which had been the glory of the Bois. Ribald shouts greeted their pantomime. Officers looked on and spoke no word of rebuke. Bottles were raised to the absent owners. A very saturnalia heralded the night of victory.

Guillaumette was all for seeking help of the Germans. They were merry fellows, as their

158 The Garden of Swords

antics showed. She had seen no such spectacle since the marionettes were at Wörth a year ago.

“Oh, the fine gowns, the silver and the gold, Madame! They will not harm us. The brutes — to dance such things in the mud. Are you not going to speak to them, to ask about Monsieur? Look at the splendid fellow in the yellow silk. He would be a Würtemberger! All the Würtembergers are animals — shall I go and ask him, Madame?”

Beatrix ran on appalled. This carnival of ribaldry seemed as some picture from the nether world. That men should sing and dance, with the dying and the dead for their audience, was an infamy passing belief. Henceforth she avoided the beacon fires as she would have avoided the lamps of hell itself. The forest became a place of terror. She scarcely breathed until she had left it, and stood in the fields with the lamps of Wörth twinkling below, and the heaven of stars looking down upon the faces of those who cried to heaven for sleep and death.

“We shall find Monsieur now, Guillaumette,” she said simply; “he will be waiting for us. Afterwards we will come to these poor people. If one only had the power to help them — the balm which would give them sleep! Is it not strange that we can walk here at all? Yesterday,

when the dead man was in our stables, we dared not pass the door. To-night the dead are everywhere ! There is no pity left in the world. Even the children are forgotten."

She spoke as one uttering thoughts which no other shared ; but Guillaumette admitted none of her philosophy.

"The Virgin be praised that I have no children this night !" she exclaimed. "And do not think that we shall find Monsieur here. He has gone to Strasburg with the others. Ask Monsieur the Curé, and he will tell you so. There would be shelter for you in the house of the curé, Madame. They do not eat the priests, those animals — and we are hungry, oh, so hungry !"

They stood above the high-road to Strasburg at the moment and could see the patrols upon it, the glistening bayonets and the unresting Uhlans. Lights were moving in all the neighbouring villages. Watch-fires flamed upon the hills ; the bugles blared incessantly. Everywhere the German cordon of possession was being drawn tight. Beatrix, in spite of herself, found her awe of this mighty, invincible host rapidly becoming a subtle fascination. Pity for France was there ; but it gave place to an overmastering realisation of victory unrelenting, to a surpassing sympathy with the dying who heard no word of grace, with the

160 The Garden of Swords

wounded whose wounds were still unbound — with those alone and friendless in the terrible night. The army, the glorious army of yesterday — it was a rabble now, fleeing through the mountains impotently. That which amounted almost to contempt for its impotence was among her thoughts. It had left the bones of France to the enemy — it had left those children of France dying there in the darkness of the hills. For her it was a glorious army no more. Edmond alone remained to her. She saw that she would not eat nor sleep until she held his hand again.

“Guillaumette,” she said, “go to the curé and tell him that I am here. If he will help me — ”

“But you will be alone, Madame.”

“I shall be with Monsieur.”

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

“*Và la* — we shall breakfast to-morrow, and I can wait. Let us go on, Madame.”

She knew that her mistress's hallucinations were the outcome of that dreadful day; nor did she quarrel with them. There could be nothing worse than the sights the woods cloaked. The dead around her — she would not look upon their faces. The wounded — she put her fingers to her ears that she might not hear their cries! And they were drawing near to the houses of her own people now. The physical craving dominated

her. She was hungry, and all else was secondary to that.

It was nearly midnight, and those who buried the dead were still at work in the open fields by the river. Beatrix saw their lanterns as changing clusters of stars upon the hillside. The pity in her heart was ever growing. A wounded horse came up and thrust its hot nose into her hand. She laid her cheek upon its face, and her tears fell fast. Fatigue had begun to master her. She had not eaten for many hours. No real belief that she would find her husband drove her on; only a pursuing idea, the idea that she must go out into the world, wandering, until she heard his voice again. Nor could she pick her way any longer. From field to field and road to road she went with heavy steps and a great pain at her heart, and pity — that unceasing pity — always prevailing above her own grief and sorrow for herself.

And so she came at last to the watch-fires of a Prussian regiment of dragoons, and men, hearing a woman's voice, sprang up and greeted her with a ribald welcome, and strong arms dragged her to the light. But the first coherent word spoken was the word of a friend; and looking up timidly she beheld Brandon North, the Englishman.

CHAPTER XV

A BIVOUAC OF DRAGOONS

HE had recognised her voice at once, and he came forward and took her hand and drew her toward the blazing fire.

“Good God, it is Beatrix!” he exclaimed, forgetting that the right thus to call her had passed to another. She answered him with a responding word of surprise.

“You, here at Wörth, Brandon — then you have seen Edmond?”

He released her hand and turned from the fire.

“No,” he said quietly, “and, of course, it is a surprise to you. I served my time with the Hessian dragoons before I came to Strasburg. None of you knew that, and I did not wish it to be known. A man must have some employment besides telling people that his wine is good. But you are cold and ill. Come to my cottage. The others are there — and we will get a glass of wine. Some of them will have news of the lancers. I was very sorry to see them hurt your house, but war is war, and it goes without

A Bivouac of Dragoons 163

saying that people must suffer. Have you any friends in Wörth?"

He tried to assume a certain nonchalance, as though he were discussing the common things of the day. She was not deceived by it; nor had the surprise of seeing him there, a fine figure in the dark green tunic, yet passed.

"You forget," she said simply. "I cannot go with you now. And Edmond is waiting for me. He should be in Wörth, or perhaps at Gunstett across the river. I waited till sunset, and when he did not come back, Guillaumette and I ran down. They have burned our house, Brandon. All the things that he loved are destroyed. And we were so happy there!"

She spoke with no design, hiding nothing of her love. There were tears in her eyes when she thought of the little house now a heap of ashes. He saw the tears, and they seemed to fall upon his heart.

"My poor child," he exclaimed — and was half ashamed that she heard the words.

"Brandon," she said very seriously, "I must find Edmond — I must go now."

"That would be foolishness, Beatrix. Wörth is no place for a woman to-night. I wonder that you came so far without insult. We must find some shelter for you till you start again. I will

164 The Garden of Swords

send a trooper now at once to see if they have any lists. It is wonderful the way our people do things. We shall know at dawn exactly what the lancers did, and that will mean news of your husband. Meanwhile, if you won't come to the cottage, you must warm your hands at this fire, and I will get a glass of wine. Believe me, I am very sorry. If there is anything to be done, you have only to ask me. There is no reason that I can see why our friendship should be broken. You do not believe all the things said about us, I am sure. We have our duty to do — to men and women. And we are not the scoundrels your people make us out."

She smiled up at him, with the look of one who had been his friend for many years.

"As if it were necessary to tell me all this — you!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Then we will take it for granted," he exclaimed, and added — "Come, here is a cloak. It will make a little soldier of you. I will send the man for the news at once, and you must drink a glass of wine. These nights fall cold, and the damp makes them worse. If we had known in Strasburg how we should meet again —"

He stopped abruptly when he saw the shadow steal over her face. He had begun to forget,

A Bivouac of Dragoons 165

he thought, that she was another man's wife. Yet every act, every word of his was full of a strong man's pity for her—the little helpless girl out there amid that saturnalia of death and of defeat. She, on her part, did not ask herself why she remained with him. No fear of his friendship drove her from the camp. She did not know that he would have laid down his life for her, that he loved her as few men love women. It was an odd meeting, that was all; a lucky meeting. And how Edmond would laugh to see her sitting there with a Prussian cloak about her shoulders and Prussians offering her wine, and Guillaumette drinking the troopers' beer, and joining in a crescendo of laughter, high-pitched and piercing.

News of the lancers came in an hour. She read in Brandon's face the truth of it, and started up from the seat of logs they had found her with beating heart and a face that was very wan and white.

“ Oh, my God,” she cried, “ he is dead ! ”

“ Not so, Beatrix.— he is unharmed — ”

“ At Wörth — ? ”

“ No; they will send him to Mainz.”

“ He is a prisoner, then? ”

He did not answer her. She stood gazing into the fire as one who sees pictures there. Guillaumette was still amusing the troopers.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PROMISE

THEY found a haven of refuge for her in the house of the curé of Morsbronn, and she slept there until the sun was shining upon Wörth again. It was odd to wake in that little white bedroom, and to find herself wrapped about with the cloak of a Hessian dragoon, and to hear the voices of men busy in the rooms below, and those other sounds of squadrons marching and of guns rolling by to Strasburg and the West. She could not, for a little while, recall the means by which she had come to the house; neither was there any clear memory of yesterday, nor of its events. When she looked from the window, out upon the high road, she could see a red cross flying from the pillar of the garden gates, and everywhere, on the heights above and in the valley below, the spiked helmets glistened in the sunshine. These indomitable Prussians were the masters of Wörth, then! The glorious army of yesterday — that army which was to defend the homes of France — it was an army no more. A sense of her utter helplessness took possession of her anew. She

remembered, one by one, the circumstances she had forgotten. They had burned her house. Edmond was a prisoner. Brandon North had brought her to the priest's cottage, and would come again at dawn to put her on the road to Strasburg. She must return to her friends, he had said. Wörth was no longer a fit place for her.

He came at eight o'clock, and waited for her in the garden of the cottage. She could hardly believe, even yet, that this great fellow, in the dark green uniform, was the same Brandon who had been her English friend in Strasburg. A new dignity was the soldier's gift to him. The invincible might of Germany, the victory of the Saxon, were so many sops to his own ambition. He spoke to her almost as a brother, and, for the first time, she had a certain awe of him.

"I'm sorry to be troublesome," he said, when he saw her at the window of the room; "we march in half an hour, and if you can be ready, an Englishman here, who is driving to Hagenau, will take you in his cart. Do you think you can manage it?"

"You still believe that I ought to go?"

"Well—it's for you to say. If you want to stop at Wörth an hour longer than you can help, I shall be surprised. That's all."

168 The Garden of Swords

She nodded her head, and began to make a hurried toilet. Upon going downstairs, she found the priest standing before the door of his sitting-room, and barring it to her. A forgotten candle guttered in a stick upon a table; and there were bloody bandages and a tumbler of water beside it. Low moaning sounds came from the apartment, and even there, in the hall, a dark crimson stain gave sanctity to the boards. She knew then that some of the wounded men were in the house; and even while she stood they carried in a dying cuirassier, and she could look for an instant into that charnel-house, where the living sat with the dead, and the aftermath of war was being reaped.

“This way, Madame, this way,” the old man cried imploringly; “those poor fellows — we can help them only with our prayers. They have been coming here all night. Ah, that we should see such sights; that God should permit men to do these things!”

He took her by the hand and led her through the kitchen of the house. There were German officers there, a merry party, hardened to the scenes about, and careless in its talk of victory and of advance. The men bowed to her as she passed, for they understood that she was the English friend of the “Herr Major.” In the garden she found Brandon waiting by his horse. The thought

came to her that it was good to have such a friend in such a place. There was no question of the "might be" where the Prussians stood.

"Oh," she said, shuddering still with horror of the house, "how good it is to breathe again! Have you been waiting long, Brandon?"

"I was up here at six, but they told me you were asleep. You must be tired enough after yesterday, and you'll have a long day. I didn't want to wake you, but it was necessary if you are to come with us. Of course you will come. There's not a house in Wörth fit for a dog just now. We can make a road if you'll go in Watts's cart. He's an eccentric old fellow, attached to one of the New York papers — though he's an Englishman for all that. I told him that you were an Englishwoman and had friends in Strasburg, and he's only too pleased to help. I dare say he'll drive you right into the town. Don't mind his bluntness. He's a regular old Bohemian, and not a sham one made in an ale-house. It will be best for you to stay there with Madame Hélène, or to go down into Switzerland, as you please; but, if you take my advice, Beatrix, you won't stop a day longer in the Place Kleber than you can help. You see for yourself what's going to happen. And Strasburg won't be a pleasant place when von Werder calls there."

170 The Garden of Swords

He spoke to her with a certain intimacy of friendship, as though they two stood apart from this quarrel of nations, and had a common interest elsewhere, in their nationality and their circumstances. She heard him in that spirit; but her own future was no concern to her. At Strasburg, among her friends — at Madame Hélène's house — all would be well there.

“Of course I shall go,” she said; “it’s very good of you to trouble so much, and Edmond will be grateful. He would not look for me anywhere else when he comes back. If I could only be sure that they are treating him well.”

She laughed at herself for the naïve confession, and corrected it instantly.

“You are a Prussian,” she said. “I forgot that. And you never told us —”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“My father made his home in Germany. I offered myself for the service. A man cannot always look at life through empty wine-bottles. Buying and selling are not altogether intellectual pursuits, you will admit. If I had thought that there was any backbone on the other side, I might have gone there on a sporting impulse. All that appealed to me — order, method, strength, iron will — is the property of the Saxon. We may not like it, but we must not dispute it. And I ought

not to say such things to you, who are waiting for breakfast. Have you ever breakfasted in camp before, Beatrix?"

He began to lead his horse away from the priest's cottage to the bivouac of dragoons, and put the question as he went. This half-hour of a subtle and satisfying intimacy might never return. He rejoiced in the comradeship, but from other motives than those which gave her pleasure in it. And she would remember only that she had found a friend.

"No," she said, looking up to him frankly. "I am a soldier's wife, and I know nothing about soldiers. If your order and your method and your iron will could help some of these poor people who die in the fields, I would think more of the Saxon. You can never make good the evil of yesterday, never, never, Brandon. What is it in us all that makes us callous to suffering as we are now? When a trooper was killed at Niederbronn a week ago, it was as though one of my own servants had died in our garden. I thought of the poor fellow all night, and prayed for him. Yesterday the dead were everywhere, and we passed them by as though they had been stones. Is it 'backbone' that gives us the courage to look at things always through the glasses of self? Why, at this very minute, ought not I to be asking myself how I can help Edmond, and not how I can get to Strasburg?"

172 The Garden of Swords

He laughed at the unconscious conceit of her thought.

“You can help your husband best by keeping out of harm’s way,” he said. “We are not savages, Beatrix, nor cannibals either, for that matter. Edmond is all the better where he is. He won’t be killed, anyway, and everyone is talking of his fellows and their charge yesterday. Whatever may happen to the rank and file, the officers will be well treated, be sure of that. I would n’t mind being in their place at all. They’ll have good quarters, and plenty to eat and drink. When the war’s over — and that’s a matter of a few weeks at the most — they’ll come back whole men, and not as those poor fellows yonder. Is there anything to make you sorry in that prospect?”

They had entered the field of the bivouac then, and he pointed to a row of wounded infantrymen, sitting beneath a tottering wall, which was the last upstanding mark where, yesterday, a prosperous farm had been. All the men were badly hurt, yet all bore their sufferings with unflinching patience. War had obliterated a memory of their nationality. A great Würtemberger nursed the head of a maimed chasseur, and a gunner of France did his best to bind up the shattered hand of one of von Werder’s men. Faint and wan and unat-

tended, these poor fellows made a brave attempt to salute when the officer approached them; nor did one of them utter so much as a single word of complaint.

“Come,” said Brandon, desiring to put a bright face upon it, “and who is looking after your breakfasts, my poor fellows?”

“Ah, Herr Major, if it were so much as a drink of water! I have been here since one o’clock yesterday — since one o’clock! My God, it is nearly twenty hours, and my lips are glued together.”

Another opened his vest and showed a jagged wound upon which the blood had congealed.

“They are slow up yonder, but then they are not in pain, Herr Major. As for me, I do not count. I shall never stand again.”

“Do not talk so,” cried an old sergeant, whose arm had been scarred and broken by a shell from Froeschweiler; “we have our duty to do, and all this is nothing. The doctor will laugh at us for troubling him. A cigar would cure me, Herr Major — ah, you are all too kind to a useless old man.”

Brandon distributed his cigars among them, and called to a trooper to fetch them water from the village and to send the ambulance. The place wherein they lay was a very pit of blood and

174 The Garden of Swords

agony ; he turned from it quickly when he saw the white face of the girl at his side. He knew that she had all the desire and pity to serve them, and he understood the helplessness she realised and blamed.

“It is a doctor’s work, Beatrix — you would only make things worse. The ambulance will be here just now, and they have already been looked after in some sort of way, as you see. You need a lot of training to stand this sort of thing, and remember you have had none at all —”

He stopped abruptly, for there were tears in her eyes.

“Brandon,” she said quickly, “do you not despise me —”

“Because you are not a doctor? Certainly not —”

“No, not for that, but for all that I have been talking about. As if anything mattered when those poor fellows suffer! And I am doing nothing, nothing. I have never done anything all my life —”

“You can begin now by going back to Madame Hélène. She is alone in Strasburg. She will have need of you in the days to come. I am afraid they will be terrible days, Beatrix.”

“Why should they be, Brandon?”

“Because we march to-day.”

Something of the strange circumstance of their association came in that moment to both of them. For the first time she read a suspicion of the whole truth in the look he turned upon her, but she would not think of it nor debate it in her mind lest that should be in itself a dishonour. After all, he was her husband's friend. She would trust her life to him, and Edmond would applaud her confidence.

"I will go to Strasburg now," she said quickly.
"If only I can hear of Edmond there!"

"If that is all," he said, "I will bring you the news myself."

She laughed.

"They would shoot you for a spy," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CITY OF THE GOLDEN MISTS

A BURLY man, with a great black beard and a sun-burnt face, drove up to the place as she spoke and exchanged words with Brandon. He had obtained a little pony-cart, by some occult means of which old travellers are the master; and he sat in it, smoking contentedly, as one who found nothing remarkable either in his presence at Wörth or in the circumstances which brought him there. When he was introduced to her as "Richard Watts," he took his china pipe from his mouth, and lifted the brim of a vast sombrero hat stuck carelessly upon the very back of his curly black hair. He would be a man of sixty years, Beatrix thought — a man of many cities, yet the servant of none.

"Is this the lady?" he asked laconically.

"This is Madame Lefort," said Brandon; "her servant is with her, but she can go behind."

The stranger nodded his head and put his pipe into his mouth again.

"Two, then," he exclaimed, and asked immediately, "Anything more?"

The City of the Golden Mists 177

Brandon laughed.

“Mr. Watts is not accustomed to this kind of luggage, Beatrix,” he said; “but he’ll see you into Strasburg, and he’s a safer escort than a squadron of hussars.”

She turned to him a little anxiously.

“But you ride to Hagenau?”

“Certainly — if your people do not say no.”

Guillaumette climbed into the cart laboriously.

“*Va là*,” she said, “here goes a fine fat goose to market. You will not eat me, Monsieur!”

She sat jauntily, her arms crossed and her eyes upon the trooper who had helped her to her seat; but the great man in the cart did not notice her. He had thrust out a huge hand to grip Beatrix by the wrist; and now he began to address her as he would have addressed a child.

“Sit there and hold the rail. The road is rough, and the pony stumbles. Have you had your breakfast? — eh, yes. Well, that’s all right. You would n’t get any if you had n’t.”

She turned to Brandon.

“You are not coming with us, after all, then.”

“Indeed, and we are — there goes the bugle.”

Richard Watts shrugged his tremendous shoulders.

178 The Garden of Swords

“The pretty soldiers,” he said; “can’t you do without them to-day, Madame?”

She looked up at him, angry at the blunt speech. There was something kind in his big eyes, but his manner was that of a boor.

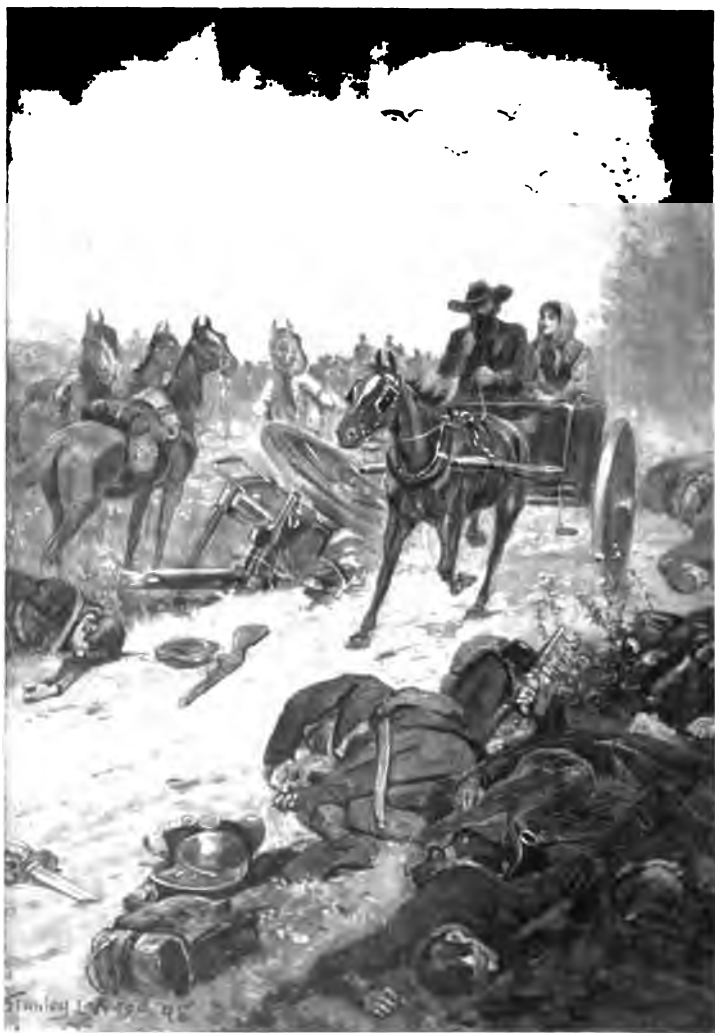
“If we are a trouble to you, sir —”

“A trouble! God bless me—an English-woman! Geeho! Geeho!”

He lashed the pony, and they began to jog across the fields. She gazed—it might be for the last time—up at the forest land where her home had been; and she saw burning houses, and churches which were but quaking walls, and black ruins of the homesteads of yesterday. In the vineyards by the river the labourers were burying the dead. Rusted cuirasses, broken helmets, twisted swords, rags which had been uniforms, rifles in the ditches, horses stiff and stark with their feet pointing upward to the sky—these were the emblems of battle around her. But the sun shone warm upon the pastures; there were gay tunics in all the valleys; she heard the music of the drums; the romance of war put a cloak upon the reality of war. And the way lay to a city and to a home. She desired with all the intensity of which she was capable to turn from that place of death to the light and life of Strasburg. Edmond would come

1950

1951



“ Here the story of the flight was to be read.”

The City of the Golden Mists 179

to her there. She thanked God that he was a prisoner, and that war could not harm him now.

They had struck the great southern road to the city; but the way was laborious, for troops followed it everywhere, and no turn of it but showed them the wavering lines of spiked helmets or the lances of the Uhlans. And here the story of the flight was to be read in all its fullness. Dead men with glassy eyes stared up at them from the foetid ditches. Masterless horses galloped by the roadside whinnying pitifully; or stood in wondering troops, saddles still upon their backs, and even their own wounds to show. No man could have numbered the rifles cast aside by the flying hosts of yesterday. Broken caissons, gun-carriages lacking wheels, empty wagons shattered and plundered, field-glasses, even letters and pocket-books, and little tokens whereby the names of those who fled were to be learned — these things bore witness to the living as the graves upon the hillside bore witness to the dead. But they provoked Beatrix no longer to despair or pity. If, of the aftermath, she should reap her lover's life, she would crave no other grace. And she was all fortunate. She thought of the children asking to-day for those who nevermore would stoop to lift them to their lips. How many there were in the very city to

180 The Garden of Swords

which this strange Englishman was taking her! How many women prayed in the silent churches for those who lay in the vineyards she was leaving! It was not selfishness, but gratitude, which turned her thoughts to such a channel.

Their way lay to the south; and many a hamlet was numbered before her companion spoke a word or took his pipe from his mouth. The exclamations of Guillaumette fell upon deaf ears. It was odd to be there on the road with one she had never seen before; but the kaleidoscope of her life had been turning swiftly for many hours. She accepted the present as it came to her, and found content therein.

“You are going to Strasburg, Monsieur?” she asked, for the very sake of speaking.

Richard Watts took his pipe from his mouth very slowly and answered her by another question.

“What’s that?” he exclaimed. “Monsieur! Bless you, child, I’m no ‘monsieur.’ I was born within sound of Bow Bells.”

“Oh,” she said, “one gets into the habit of it here. You are Mr. Watts, are you not?”

He nodded his head.

“Richard Watts, young lady — as much at your service as your French friends will let me be.”

The City of the Golden Mists 181

“Do you think we shall have any difficulty in getting into Strasburg, then?”

“No difficulty at all — and God help us when we’re there.”

He smoked contemplatively for a little while, and then continued:

“There is nothing good in France to-day, young lady. I have been fighting all my life, and I know what I say. Your German friends will be at the gates of Strasburg in a week and then the fruit will fall. It rots on the trees already. It has been rotting since the day that knaves began to pluck it. Look at that fellow in the ditch there. Yesterday he was all gold lace and glory. To-day he is dead, and you cannot see the gold lace for mud. The glory has gone up to the hills, where the Prussians burn the farms. You have married a Frenchman, and you do not believe me, as a matter of course. Twenty years ago I thought as you did. It’s a long time, twenty years, Madame — a long time. France was the first nation in Europe twenty years ago. In twenty years hence, she may be so again. These poor fellows could not wait, you see.”

A dead chasseur lay in the ditch at the roadside. His head was pillowed upon his arm as one who slept a child’s sleep; but his splendid uniform had been washed by the mud of the

182 The Garden of Swords

fields, and the pillagers had cut off two of his fingers for the sake of the rings he wore. Beatrix closed her eyes that she might not see the dead man's face. To what new scenes of peril and of death was that strange journey carrying her? The cities in danger! She could not believe it possible.

"I am going to Strasburg because my husband will come there when they release him. I could not go anywhere else, for I have no other friends in France. If the Germans follow, it will not matter. They are gentlemen, I am sure. Even you admit that?"

He nodded his head approvingly.

"You are quite right to go," he said, "and they are gentlemen, as I admit. If war is like a good dinner and our gentlemen dine sometimes — that does n't concern you. Strasburg will suffer, but you have English friends — ah, your friends are English, Madame?"

She smiled.

"And if they are not?"

"In that case we must make the most of a bad job," he said bluntly.

She looked up at him quickly to read a face hardened in a gravity very foreign to it. But he did not speak, and they had left the high-road now and were in the heart of the forest

The City of the Golden Mists 183

of Hagenau. In and out, by woodland paths, through avenues of chestnuts, past little churches which spoke of God's peace and of all the primitive forest life, the cross-road carried them. All the hubbub and turmoil of the great highway was hushed here. Impossible to believe, as the wind stirred the trees to a murmur of song and the glades opened their golden hearts to the wayfarer, that the things of yesterday had been truths. War was an hallucination of their sleep. There had been no battle. Such contrasts were beyond the possibilities.

“Who could realise that we were at Wörth this morning?” she exclaimed, as a turn of the road opened to their view scenes of a remoter and even more sylvan beauty. “Is there anyone in these woods who would understand that a great army is all around us, and that those poor fellows lie dying in the vineyards? I don't believe, I cannot believe —”

Richard Watts smoked on doggedly, but presently he pulled up the pony suddenly.

“Look there, young lady,” he said, as he jerked his whip in the direction of a great tree; “there is something to help your incredulity.”

Her eyes turned toward the place, and she shuddered at that which the glade had hidden from her.

184 The Garden of Swords

They had taken a Uhlan in the forest and hanged him from a tree. The body swayed gently in the breeze, and showed gaping wounds upon the hands and throat. A group of hags, their faces dark with the ferocity of anger unsatiated, stood in the shade of the tree and greeted their own work triumphantly.

“He was taken at Berdot’s Farm, Monsieur — he rode up at daybreak and Henriette found him. Ah! she is brave, Henriette. She let the dogs loose, the droll. He will not go back to his Bismarck to-day, Monsieur. And it is our work — our work!”

They screeched together as creatures of the fables; but the man whipped up the pony and was soon in the heart of the silent forest again. For a long time now he puffed at his great pipe stoically; but it was not lost upon Beatrix that he skirted the town of Hagenau, and began to go faster as he approached the city of Strasburg.

“Is not Mr. North to meet us there?” she asked a little anxiously.

He answered her brusquely.

“After the war, young lady — we will learn patience. I cannot wait to-day. I am flying from the defenders of France — as good a Frenchman as any of them.”

“But there are no soldiers here?”

The City of the Golden Mists 185

“Glory be to God for that! The fewer the better. See as few of them as you can, girl.”

She thought upon it for a little while, and then exclaimed, as though she read his thoughts —

“My husband will be very grateful to Mr. North.”

The idea amused him. She could hear him chuckling to himself.

“Will be grateful, young lady?” he asked presently — “you said grateful?”

“And why not?”

“No reason at all. We are always grateful when the man who knocks us down is the very good friend of our wife. Would not you be under the circumstances?”

Never, until that moment, had there come to her the thought that Edmond might not understand the circumstances which had compelled her to seek Brandon's friendship. She sat debating it very silently. She would not believe that her companion's words were aught but a jest; and yet, as the cart jogged on, a sense of unrest and foreboding displaced the content with which she had quitted Wörth. If Edmond should not think as she did! If he should hold that war had made that friendship impossible! She blamed herself that she had not thought of it before.

186 The Garden of Swords

“Of course he will understand,” she said, rather as one uttering her thoughts aloud. “They were old friends in Strasburg. And he will know why I went to the camp. I shall tell him all about it when he comes back to Strasburg.”

“Tell him nothing, child. A tale untold is not to be criticised. There is always the off-chance. I am an old man and have the right to advise you. Go to your friends in Strasburg and keep your own secrets. Too much confidence has ruined many a man, and woman too. Your husband will know nothing unless you tell him. Why should you make him unhappy?”

“I will tell everything — he has the right to know.”

He would not agree with her; but he watched her with kindly eyes, and when, long hours afterwards, the city of Strasburg, lying in purple and golden mists of the evening light, came to their view, he said to her almost earnestly —

“If ever you want a friend yonder, young lady, remember old Richard Watts. Any Englishman in Strasburg will show you where he lives. Come and tell him all about it. He understands women and he understands men. You will find him alone; he has been alone all his life.”

She thought that he spoke with an infinite tenderness; her own heart was heavy, and the

The City of the Golden Mists 187

sympathy he offered her touched a plaintive chord of melancholy which the hour, and the scene, and the city of the golden mists helped to linger in her path. She had come home, indeed — the bride of yesterday — yet she knew not whether to-morrow would permit the house of her affections to stand, or would leave her one true friend in all France. The hosts of Germany were about to cross that plain, above which rose up the spires and pinnacles of Strasburg. The very silence of the night was as of some herald of storm and tempest raging in the hearts of men. But it was fear for herself that dominated her when they entered the city by the northern gate, and the pony began to trot toward the Broglie Platz. If Edmond should not understand!

“I know that you wish to be kind to me,” she said, “and I will not forget. I have many friends here, for I am Madame Héléne’s grandchild. Everyone knows the Countess of Görzdorf. She lives in the Place Kleber.”

Richard Watts pulled the pony back upon its haunches.

“Eh, what’s that?” he exclaimed. “The Countess of Görzdorf — you know her?”

“She is my grandmother.”

“Then you are the daughter of Marie Douay — impossible!”

188 The Garden of Swords

The exclamation burst from him involuntarily. He sat quite still for some minutes, regarding her very curiously. All about them was the life of Strasburg, the music of the bands, the glare of the lamps before the cafés, the buzz of tongues, and the rumbling wheels. The man saw nothing of this life. He had eyes only for his little companion, who had just told him that she was Madame Hélène's granddaughter. She, in her turn, sat wondering at his astonishment.

"You do not know Madame Hélène?" she asked presently, for he continued to let the pony stand.

"Know her, child — how should I know her?"

"You are a stranger to Strasburg, then?"

He laughed hardly.

"An utter stranger."

The words seemed to please him. He repeated them as though in emphasis.

"An utter stranger, young lady — without a home anywhere."

A great idea, one of pity for his loneliness, came to her. She could not account for her friendship, yet friendship she gave to this rugged acquaintance instinctively.

"If you would come to the Place Kleber, they would be very grateful to you," she said. "I

The City of the Golden Mists 189

am sure Madame Hélène would like to thank you herself."

Again he looked at her with a curiosity he could not cloak.

"Marie Douay's daughter — so you are Marie Douay's daughter!" he continued to mutter, as one who has recalled forgotten names and places. "Well, the world is small indeed. Do you know your way to the Place Kleber from here, child?"

She laughed at the doubt.

"Every inch of it."

"Then I will say good-night."

It was an abrupt invitation for her to leave him, and she did not misunderstand it. There was nothing odd in such a man telling her that here was the parting of the ways.

"I am sorry you will not come with me," she repeated, when she stood at last upon the pavement. "Madame Hélène would have been so glad. Perhaps you will call to-morrow?"

He thrust his hand over the side of the cart and held hers for a moment in a clasp which almost crushed her fingers.

"God bless you, little passenger," he said, ignoring her question. "Don't forget old Richard Watts. And mind you keep your secrets."

He was gone with the words, away into the shadows of the great city. She turned quickly

190 The Garden of Swords

toward her own home, for the bells of the churches were striking midnight. As the musical chimes rang out, they seemed to say, "Secrets, secrets — keep your secrets."

Was it true, then, that some thought, born of the impotence of France and of yesterday's defeat, had come into her own life, and that it must be hidden from Edmond? She would listen to no such suggestion of shame, but hurried on to the old home and the beloved voices, and the arms outstretched to hold the little wanderer. And through the forests and over the mountains of France, by many roads and woodland paths, the hosts of Germany marched on toward the city whose doom the finger of fate already had written.

BOOK III

The Siege

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRST DAYS

THE French fled from Wörth, and the passes of the Vosges were open to the victorious armies of the invader. Villages, which knew not why war had come to the vineyards, beheld the advancing hosts that carried the sword into the gardens of France. People said that no man might number them, no general withstand them. For a nation armed had gone out against those who had betrayed a nation. Old men spoke of Austerlitz and of Jena, and told one another that never again would the shame of the new day be forgotten nor its humiliations avenged. Peasants fled from their homes to the shelter of the cities; the wounded crawled to the churches and lay side by side with the forgotten dead. Everywhere the devastating hand withered the fields and gave payment of their ashes. The curse was

192 The Garden of Swords

upon France, men said. The day of hope had passed. Out there upon the hill lands the spiked helmets glistened and the Uhlans rode triumphantly; the hope, the courage of Paris seemed a mockery beyond words. For the children cried for bread; the dirge for the dead was the daily prayer.

Westward and southward from Wörth MacMahon's hosts had fled to tell the tale in all the towns, and even to proclaim it at the gates of Strasburg and in the cafés by the great cathedral there. The wounds the soldiers showed, the enduring fear of those mighty forces crossing the mountains so swiftly, moved the city to belief and to activity. Men would not stop to ask why this had been, this betrayal surpassing belief, this wreck of the glory of a century. The Germans were coming to the gates of the city they loved. All that life could give in defence of that city should be their offering to France. Whatever else of shame and of defeat contributed to their country's harvest of the war, Strasburg at least would play her part with honour. Never, while one stone stood upon another, would she open her gates to the Prussian king. The few of German heart and birth, who remained indifferent to the issues, found themselves silenced by the greater voice of patriotism. Citizens con-

gregated in all the cafés to tell the good story. "To the last brick, comrades — our general has said so." And that watchword became their own from the first.

The news came to the city on the seventh day of August. The eighth day had not dawned before the great work began. Old and young, civilians and soldiers — no longer was there to be any distinction of age or class or fitness for the task. Even the women went to gaze upon the mighty citadel, and to tell each other that those glistening guns were greater than all the hosts of Germany. In the squares and public places the National Guards and *francs-tireurs* drilled incessantly. The whole city was full of the sounds of war — of squadrons tramping, of the blaring music of the bands, of the rumbling of the great guns, of the brisk word of command and of encouragement. Even little children were taught to honour the general who had said that Strasburg should not open her gates while one stone was left upon another.

While all this was the talk of the open places of the city, there was to be found in the privacy of their houses a determination as real, as faithful, as unwavering as the creed of the multitude or the gospel of the cafés. In the Place Kleber itself, Madame Hélène, that mistress of gentle-

194 The Garden of Swords

ness and of love, spoke of courage always ; of courage and of patience, and of a woman's work for France. People who passed the great house in the Place Kleber would point up to the windows where the beloved face was to be seen, and would tell each other that there was the mother of the city, ever giving good counsel with a mother's heart and inspiring them to that self-sacrifice which is the truest gift of motherhood. Beatrix herself, listening to that gentle voice, would forget her own regrets and all that had been since Edmond left the chalet at Niederwald. There, in the streets of the city, were those who called for her pity and her help. Wan men, hobbling upon crutches ; great fellows hugging terrible wounds ; lads robbed for ever of the joy of youth ; old soldiers with tears upon their cheeks because they could fight for France no more — Wörth had sent such as these in their thousands to Strasburg. She saw them sunning themselves in the square before her house. Often she listened to the pathetic story of their flight. She knew not why destiny had so done to them yet had spared the man she loved.

“If one could only be grateful enough !” she said to Hélène on the morning of the seventh day after her return. “I feel sometimes that I have lost the power to be thankful for anything. It

will be different when Edmond comes home. And one can only wait, wait, wait."

But *grandmère* shook her head in kindly rebuke.

"Of ourselves always, dear child! Is there no one else but a poor old woman and an impatient little wife in Strasburg to-day? Do not the streets teach us their lesson? Ah, the brave hearts in the streets, Beatrix; the brave men who would save our homes for us! What are we doing for them — we, the women of France? What help shall we give them when the need comes and the children suffer? And we must help them. What can we ask of the poor when the rich give nothing? Let us give abundantly, dear child, as it has been given to us."

There was a noble courage in her voice; but to Beatrix that voice was as a sound from afar. She believed no longer in France or the armies of France. The mighty impotence of Wörth remained her abiding message. The doom of the city and of her home seemed already written. The childish fear, that this lack of faith put a bond upon her love, grew day by day. She was not worthy of the man who had whispered his ambitions to her in the *châlet* of the Niederwald and had sealed his vow of faith in France with a lover's caress. Her very belief in the might

196 The Garden of Swords

and the glory of the Saxon stood against her as a sin. The future lay through a valley of shadows which gathered quickly about her path, and enveloped her in the gloom of foreboding and of doubt. She was not a Frenchwoman; she never would understand — never, never.

“Dear Hélène, how good you are,” she said impulsively. “I feel guilty when I listen to you. All that I see here makes me think of Edmond. If only one could write to him. If only one were sure that the prison meant nothing to him but four square walls and a German jailor. It would have been different, perhaps, a year ago — but now! Ah, mamma, you were never married in the Minster, and you never went to the Niederwald for your honeymoon. My life has changed since that day they came for him. I don’t think I have any heart left. I try to remember other things, but every day the question is, Will he come this morning—will it be next month, next year—or never, never again until the end?”

She lifted a white face to the kindly eyes, and felt old Hélène’s arms about her neck.

“I cannot lose him, even for France,” she said very pitifully; “you are not angry with me, Hélène?”

“Angry my child, God forbid! A thousand

women's hearts are heavy as yours to-day. We must not let them see our tears, we to whom they look for hope and courage. When Edmond comes, our hands must not be empty. Oh, think of it, Beatrix—there are Germans at Schiltigheim, Germans at the gates of our own city. To-morrow—ah, God knows what we shall see and hear to-morrow!”

There were tears upon her cheeks as this doubt for the city of her childhood came to trouble her. Beatrix knew well of what she was thinking. The armies of France had not saved them yesterday. Who should say that to-morrow would find those armies victorious?

“If all were as you, dear H el ene,” she said tenderly, “we need fear for nothing. And we shall know how to suffer for Edmond’s sake if the day comes. Sometimes I think that I should be glad for it to come. It is hard to be a woman when those in whom you trust have ceased to be men. At W or th I believed that nothing in all the world could defeat the armies of France. I dare not tell you all I saw there. Strasburg cannot be like that. Nothing will ever be like that again.”

“It will be as our destiny writes it, my child. And we must have faith, faith always. It is all a woman can offer—her whole heart and soul and

198 The Garden of Swords

sympathy for those who suffer that she may have a home. Let us give unstintingly while we may."

They went together to the windows of the house to watch the marching of a regiment, which went by with banners flying and drums rolling, and all the glorious panoply of war. It was a sunny Sabbath morning of August, and in all the steeples the bells were calling the citizens to Mass. When the troops had passed and the cheering for the "Mother of the City," whose white hairs the soldiers had seen at the window, had died away, Beatrix quitted the house and went alone toward the Minster; for thither the citizens now turned, and there the great service of the day was to be held. She had never seen so many people abroad in the streets of Strasburg before; nor did they wear the air of those who feared for themselves or their houses. Women anticipated coming victories in colours which would not mourn the past irrevocable. Men walked in groups and spoke of the brave General Urich. Bands played everywhere. The cafés were scenes of mirth and excitement. In the churches themselves priests spoke of a nation fighting God's battles, and moved their flocks to a frenzy of applause. Old soldiers told of Jena and of Italy. Little children carried long swords

at their belts, and their watchword was "*Aux armes.*"

By these she passed quickly, for the bells told her that the service was about to begin. In the cathedral square she found a great concourse of people moved by some savage impulse she could not at first understand. Ferocious cries were raised; she heard the smashing of glass in the doors of a café, and saw bludgeons and sticks raised threateningly above the heads of the people. A man at her side told her that they had caught a spy and were about to kill him. They had taken him in the Minster itself. He had run to the café for shelter, but they would settle his affair, and he would go back to Germany no more. Had it been possible, she would have drawn back from the crowd; but the human wave engulfed her and carried her forward, almost to the doors of the house. Half-fainting in the press, unable to make her voice heard, she became unwillingly the spectator of that tragedy of the Sabbath. She saw the white-faced man in the porch of the house; she heard his frenzied appeals for mercy. Foam dripped from his lips, his hair was dishevelled, his coat torn, his hands upraised to protect his face; but no one thought of pity or of justice. Men struck at him with their fists; a drunkard threw a glass at him and

200 The Garden of Swords

cut his forehead; the blows of canes fell upon his face as whips that strike a board; blood flowed from his nostrils. He fell fainting, and those about him beat out his brains as he lay senseless upon the floor.

The people swept by with clamorous shouts. The spy was dead. Strasburg had settled with him. For an instant, Beatrix reeled back against the window of the café. Everything in the cathedral square swam before her eyes. She thought that she would fall, but a strong arm was placed suddenly about her waist, and a voice that she knew whispered a word in her ear.

“Silence,” was the word; “I have brought the news I promised you.”

She looked up at the man's face and read it through his disguise. Brandon North himself was at her side.

CHAPTER XIX

A FACE AT THE WINDOW

HE was dressed as a Frenchman, with a polished silk hat and a big bow carelessly tied. For the rest, his disguise was of the slightest, yet so skilfully done that a friend would have passed him in the street. But he gave her no opportunity to express surprise at his presence there, nor at his new appearance.

“Let us go where there are not so many interesting people,” he said. “I have much to say to you.”

She was dizzy still, and pale and trembling. He called a waiter from a café and ordered a little glass of brandy. When she had drunk it, he began to lead her away from the cathedral towards the Rue de Kehl. Her curiosity amused him.

“You see, I have no business in Strasburg,” he said lightly. “People might misunderstand me as they misunderstood that poor fellow yonder. It would be quite wrong of them — but then, I have a regard for my bones.”

She shuddered.

202 The Garden of Swords

“They would kill you, Brandon!” she exclaimed.

“Exactly; they would kill me. It is one of the follies of war. You beat out a man’s brains because he might be a spy. Afterwards you are sorry, but you cannot put his brains back again. Forgive me, I am only talking in general terms. We had better not particularise until we are in safer quarters.”

She stopped suddenly. The peril in which he stood, and which she must in some measure share, was not to be overlooked. Many, both civilians and soldiers, were passing on their way to the Minster square. A regiment of Gardes Mobiles went by with swinging step and merry music. She knew that a word whispered to them, a word that a Prussian dragoon had entered Strasburg, would bring instant death to the man who had come into the city because of his promise to her.

“You were wrong to come; I was wrong to ask you,” she said quickly. “They would never understand — never.”

He laughed lightly and lit a cigarette.

“We will not consult them, Beatrix,” he said; “I came here because I knew you would be anxious. You must give me your word that you will not tell one man, woman, or child in all Strasburg. It’s my only chance. Even old

A Face at the Window 203

Hélène must not know. What is n't known cannot be misunderstood. Don't think I have come on my own business at all. If I was that sort of person I would not be at your side now. All that we want to learn about this place we learnt a year ago—and, of course you have been to church, Madame Lefort ? ”

His voice and manner changed quickly as an officer of the guard elbowed him from the pavement. When the man was out of hearing he began again :

“ That is old Gatelet ; he has dined with me at the Maison Rouge many a day. I wonder what he would say if he knew where I had been since we saw each other ? It is astonishing how you forget your liking for a man when he's on the other side, especially when the other side is winning.”

Again she checked her pace to question him.

“ Brandon,” she said, “ where are you going to now ? ”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“ Anywhere, where there are no listeners. I am lodging for to-day with Madame Venier, over at the little white house there. She has one of the ministers from St. Thomas's with her, and enough daughters to chaperone a regiment. If you would walk into her parlour —”

204 The Garden of Swords

She stamped her foot angrily.

“ You know that I cannot go.”

“ Very well, then ; I ’ll forget that I suggested it. But you can’t write to Edmond here at the gate.”

“ You think that I could write to him ? ”

“ I know that you could, for I ’ll send the letter myself.”

She breathed quickly, debating it. Some of the men whom she had seen in the café when the spy was struck down were coming up the street. She entered the house when she saw them, and he followed her quickly.

“ I have no right to come,” she protested. “ Edmond would never forgive me.”

“ Oh, now — that ’s nonsense. Why should he not forgive you ? I will tell him all about it myself — when the proper time comes. Meanwhile, he is at Ulm, and will not give his parole. Persuade him to, and you may have him back in Strasburg in a week’s time. But I would n’t if I were you. It’s dangerous, and might lead to the unexpected. He’s living like a prince where he is, and there are n’t any bullets. There will be plenty if he comes back to Strasburg.”

“ I do not understand,” she said helplessly. “ What is the parole he must give, and why ? ”

He pointed to an arm-chair, and drew it up to the table for her.

A Face at the Window 205

"It's just this way," he said — "but will you let me smoke? I have been about the streets all day in this Sunday best, and it's a little heavy for the nerves."

She nodded her head quickly, while he filled the pipe and lighted it deliberately. The sense of their danger was more sure every moment that she lingered there. The horrid scene at the doors of the Minster still haunted her eyes. This man at her side might make another scene such as that — and for her sake.

"I am waiting to hear about the parole," she said.

"Well," he answered bluntly, "it's this way. If he will promise not to bear arms against Germany for the rest of the war, they'll send him back to you. I know Edmond well. He won't give that promise unless you ask it. And if he gives it, and comes back to Strasburg, a week will find him on the fortifications."

"In which case?"

"In which case they will shoot him when we take the city."

He did not speak boastfully, but there was behind his words a *soupeçon* of that arrogance which victory may give even to a man incapable of common emotions. She heard him as one who neither counselled nor dissuaded her, but left every-

206 The Garden of Swords

thing to her own judgment. Never had she been asked to decide a question so momentous.

“You know that I cannot write it,” she exclaimed hotly; “he would think I did not wish him to return.”

“Very well; but you know what you are risking. He will certainly be shot when we come in.”

“Oh, my God,” she said; “what a cruel thing war is!”

“To the vanquished, of course. The mischief is that our French friends never know when they are vanquished. Edmond will be like the others. He will give his word — and break it.”

“I don’t believe it,” she exclaimed emphatically; “when he comes to the Place Kleber he will listen to me. I shall make it a point of honour between us. He may break his word to you, but he never will to me.”

“Then write the letter now. It shall go to Ulm to-morrow. I don’t hunger for the sights of Strasburg, you may be sure. To-night will see me on the other side of the river and thankful to be there.”

“Brandon,” she exclaimed, “how much I owe to you!”

He laughed.

“I should be a poor man if all my ledger accounts were like yours, Beatrix.”

A Face at the Window 207

He began to pace the room that she might write uninterruptedly. For a long while she sat contemplating the white paper before her. Though she had combated his assertions, she knew in her heart that he spoke the truth, and that the letter which brought her husband back to Strasburg might also be his death-warrant. Edmond would never resist the spirit then prevailing in the city. He would go to the fortifications, and the Prussians would take him there. They would shoot him as one who had broken his parole, and hers would be the word which called him back to his doom. She could not write that word; she must leave it to his judgment, she thought. Nor could she tell him why she hesitated. Impossible to say "I fear that you will break your oath." Rather, she wrote words of love and sympathy, narrating all that had happened at Strasburg — her meeting with her old friend, Brandon North, on the evening of the battle, the strange companion she had found upon the road, the anticipations of a siege, the news that the Prussians were at Schiltigheim. But she did not say, "Come back to me," and there were tears in her eyes when she sealed the letter.

"Well," said Brandon, who had watched her closely, "you have finished it."

She turned away sadly.

208 The Garden of Swords

“ I have flattered you by taking your opinion.”

“ Oh, I don't count in the matter. But I am sure you are wise, Beatrix. Another month will finish this business. Better for him to come home then with whole bones than now — to God knows what. And you — of course, you are leaving Strasburg ? ”

“ Leaving Strasburg — why ? ”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“ Because the Prussians are at Schiltigheim.”

“ Is that all ? ”

He laughed — almost brutally, she thought.

“ Not at all ; it is only the beginning. In a month there will be no Strasburg to remain in. Forgive me if I am too frank. One seems able to talk to you as one talks to no one else. I suppose it's because we're both English, Beatrix.”

She thought that the confession was an indirect sneer at her husband ; her cheeks crimsoned in resentment.

“ There is no other country but England ? ” she exclaimed ironically.

“ I think so,” he said simply.

The great pride of his belief appealed to her. She held out her hands to him.

“ Edmond is your friend,” she exclaimed ; “ you will except him always. And I am very

A Face at the Window 209

grateful to you, Brandon — more grateful than I can say.”

He pooh-poohed her expression of thanks, and was about to take leave of her when a face, thrust close to the window, made them both draw back. It was the face of Gatelet, the officer of the National Guard, whom they had passed in the street an hour ago. Visible for an instant, it disappeared at once as Brandon turned with a startled exclamation and took a step to the window.

“Gatelet — by all that’s unlucky,” he said, standing irresolute and concealing from her all that moment meant to him. She, in turn, was conscious of a tremor of excitement and a dread unlike anything she had ever known.

“Oh, my God, Brandon — if he should have recognised you !”

He forced a laugh, but took up his hat as he spoke.

“Well,” he said, feigning merriment, “it would certainly be unpleasant, Beatrix.”

“But you will leave Strasburg — now, this moment.”

“Not at all — I am going for a walk to the café of the Contades.”

“To tell all the city that you are here.”

He began to put on his gloves.

“Gatelet certainly recognised me, or he would

210 The Garden of Swords

not have come back. As he does not know my business and will not trouble himself to guess it, the odds are that he takes me for a spy. In that case I am going to give them a run for their money, Beatrix. Once the sun does me the favour to set, I shall get to Schiltigheim without trouble. Meanwhile I prefer the open—you understand.”

They left the house together. There was no one before its doors. She watched him striding along the road to the gardens. She knew that he had come to the city for her sake, and she trembled when she contemplated the position in which his friendship for her had placed him.

Nor could she hide it from herself that she was helping one who yesterday was, and to-morrow would be, the enemy of that country which had given her a lover and a home.

CHAPTER XX

THE BEGINNING OF THE TERROR

MANY fled from the city in the week that followed that memorable Sunday ; but old H el ene remained in the Place Kleber. No word or argument would turn her from her purpose. The people looked to her for example. She would not fail them. Even the Bishop himself, who came daily to her house to counsel flight, could not persuade her.

“ I have lived here for fifty years,” she said ; “ am I to run away now because the gates are closed to the enemies of France ? Is that your advice, monseigneur ? Shall we leave the sick in their beds and the wounded to die in the streets ? Shall we say, ‘ Good-bye, brave fellows ; when the war is done we will come back from Geneva to thank you ’ ? Is this our trust in the God of France ? Ah, you do not think so, my good friend — you do not wish it.”

The Bishop shook his head, but could not gainsay her.

“ You do not know what is about to happen to us,” he said gently ; “ every day there are more

212 The Garden of Swords

Prussians in the Ruprecht's Au. Guns are coming always from Coblentz and Wesel and Magdeburg. They will not leave one stone upon another — I tremble for you and yours, my daughter. Yet, God knows, we should be grateful for your courage."

There was no braver man in Strasburg, and he would leave the Place Kleber with a glad heart after such a talk as this. To all who doubted, or were craven or of little faith, he said —

"Go to Madame Héléne, my son. She is a woman, and she will protect you. While one stone stands upon another, the Mother of the City prays for her children. Go to her, and tell her that you wish the General to open the gates."

They turned away ashamed, and went abroad to spread the good tidings. Everywhere the placid life of the great house was an example for the city. And never was example needed so sorely by a people. Day by day the news was more grave, the situation more hopeless. Now tidings of von Werder's march, now news of the Prussian guns, now of the fall of villages — every hour added to the dismay and the panic. Unwillingly men and women began to realise that their mighty citadel, their ramparts, which had stood up during the centuries, were powerless to break the girdle of iron which cut them off from France and liberty

The Beginning of the Terror 213

and even the common things of life. They spoke of courage, of endurance, of resistance to the last man; yet this talk was for the café and the market-place. At home, with their children about them, they began to forget even the vocations which gave them bread. Unrest and doubt were everywhere. When the first of the guns was heard, and men knew that at last the hour was at hand, they went bravely through the streets; but the thought of each one was for the house which sheltered him, for the safety of those whom it had been his life's task to foster.

Beatrix was often abroad in the streets of the city after the day of her meeting with Brandon North; but she did not fear as the others about her, nor share their apprehensions. The safety of Strasburg was no longer of moment to her. She counted the days which should bring her some news of Edmond or of her letter. There was always in her mind the thought that Brandon might come again, and that her secret would be discovered. She could imagine a guilt of that secrecy which others, perchance, would not lay to her charge. The doubt that Edmond might not approve, might even blame her for the friendship, was not to be satisfied. She did not know if Brandon had escaped again after his flight from the Rue de Kehl. Wherever, in the public places,

214 The Garden of Swords

she saw a concourse of people, then her heart faltered and her step trembled. She could not forget that white face in the café — the blood that trickled upon it, the merciless canes which beat it down. If that man had been her English friend!

Night and day she thought of these things, sleeping little, walking abroad for the very sake of solitude. It was a strain to eat at the great table, and to hear old Héléne's brave words, and to realise how little she shared that enduring belief in the glory of France and the hopes for the days to come. Sometimes she had the impulse to tell all, to say, "I have seen Brandon in the Rue de Kehl, and he has taken my letter to Ulm." Her promise remained, however. A whisper might endanger the life of the man who had risked so much to save her. She could satisfy her own conscience, but not the reason of others, she thought.

There were few of her friends in the city, but such as braved the siege she saw every day; and forgot her own care in the babble of news and scandal. Pretty Thérèse Lavencourt and Georgine took her to the gardens often; and it was in the gardens, just ten days after Brandon's flight, that she first met the man Gatelet again, and found herself face to face with him. She knew that her

The Beginning of the Terror 215

cheeks flushed crimson, and she could hear her heart beating; but she was smiling when she took his hand, and she realised what part she must play.

“Ah,” he said gaily, “then the guns do not keep you from the gardens, ladies?”

Thérèse Lavencourt laughed in that high key which was the terror of amateur pianists who played often at her mother’s house.

“Oh, but you are here, monsieur,” she said.

He bowed at the compliment, and other officers, hussars, and *francs-tireurs* came up to the place.

“Here is Mademoiselle Lavencourt, come to dance to the music of the guns,” he exclaimed; “we shall make a set of quadrilles, eh, Duvisne!”

A very thin lancer, thus appealed to, answered:

“The set would only be complete when the Captain comes back. Have you any news of your husband, Madame Lefort?”

Beatrix looked at Gatelet in spite of herself, but answered frankly —

“I believe he is at Ulm, Monsieur. He will not give his parole, and we must wait for your dance until the war is over.”

“Bravo, bravo!” cried several voices together, but Gatelet said —

“If only the Germans would wait also! There

216 The Garden of Swords

is too much brass in their band for my taste. Yesterday they played all day upon the Porte Saverne. You can hear the music now if you will listen—”

They waited a moment, and a low booming report seemed to shake the very ground beneath their feet. Thérèse Lavencourt laughed again, but Georgine, a plump blonde from Rouen, feigned alarm, and leaned heavily upon the young lancer's arm.

“ Oh, Monsieur,” she cried, “ how silly of me ! And I have no husband at Ulm ! ”

Thérèse Lavencourt took up the theme as they all began to walk slowly toward a stand where the band played a military march with all that fervour which marked the faith of Strasburg in the first days of her isolation.

“ That is the worst of husbands,” she exclaimed, with a glance at a captain of hussars which was unmistakable; “ first you want them to show themselves; then you want them to go away. When they are gone, you shed tears. How silly it all is ! And, of course, one pretends to be sorry, and all that. As if there was nothing else in life but marriage ! ”

“ Nevertheless, marriage is decidedly amusing,” exclaimed the captain of hussars. It was the very subject he desired to speak about.

The Beginning of the Terror 217

Light wit and shallow talk drew the little group away from the music to the shelter of the shrubberies. Beatrix found herself suddenly alone with Gatelet. She was sure that he had contrived the rendezvous, and he took up the conversation at once.

“You hear that, Madame Lefort. But you do not agree with it, of course. If she had said that marriage was exciting —”

“Exciting, Monsieur?”

He laughed brutally.

“Certainly; I said exciting.”

She answered him very coldly:

“I have never thought about the question.”

“Naturally — you leave others to think. Your friends, for instance. Pray count me among the number.”

The very suggestion was an insult — a subtle insult; but she realised that in some way this man shared a secret momentous to her happiness, and she restrained her just resentment.

“You were my husband’s friend, Monsieur Gatelet; I am sure you are mine.”

“Do not doubt it. It is pleasant to see the faces one knows when so many are missing. I think often of our old acquaintances — of Tripard, and Giraud, and Chandellier, and the Englishman. Ah, you remember the Englishman, Brandon North, Madame?”

218 The Garden of Swords

She doubted no longer that he knew the truth. Hot blood flushed her cheeks crimson. This man shared her secret, then — this man who had twice insulted her in as many minutes.

“I remember Mr. Brandon North, certainly,” she exclaimed, making a supreme effort to retain her self-control; “he was one of my husband’s friends.”

The man nodded his head cunningly.

“I am sure of it — as he is a friend of yours, Madame. You will be glad on that account to know that he is still in Strasburg.”

She was not actress enough to restrain the cry which came to her lips.

“Still in Strasburg, Monsieur — Mr. North in Strasburg !”

He took her by the arm and began to speak with a familiarity which he claimed of his knowledge.

“Listen,” he said; “you can trust me. When he left you last Sunday — do not mind that I know — I am a man of honour — when he left you last Sunday he meant to go back to his German friends. But a little accident happened, Madame — you never thought of that. He wished to leave us, but he was not able. At the corner of the Rue de Kehl a gun-carriage crushed his ankle. He fell fainting, but it was I who helped him

The Beginning of the Terror 219

up. 'He is the good friend of Madame Lefort,' I said; 'he shall suffer nothing at my hands, for I am sure he is not here to spy out our secrets. And he is in Strasburg now, at the house of Madame Clairon in the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel. He waits for you to go there; you will not disappoint him.'

He released her hand, and with a familiar salute, the meaning of which was unmistakable, he left her. His words were as a blow upon her face. She knew that the life of her friend was in this man's keeping — the gift of one who had put upon her the ultimate insult.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RUE DE L'ARC-EN-CIEL

HE had left her at the gate of the gardens ; but she did not seek her friends again, nor think of going home. Conscious of no guilt, her own silence was in itself as the accusation of a crime. In this man's eyes she was condemned. He believed the worst ; she had permitted him to believe it. All her surpassing love for Edmond had brought her but this as its reward — that a stranger should have the right thus to charge her. And she could not defend herself. A word would sacrifice the life of him who had laughed at the perils of the city that she might have news of her husband. The ultimate penalty of her folly — if folly it were — must be paid. Gatelet had spared the life of her friend because he believed the worst of their friendship. Any motive less strong would not have sealed his lips. Even her confusing logic taught her that. If Brandon were not to die as that other before the gates of the Minster, she must suffer the shame which his presence in Strasburg had put upon her. The very thought of it burned her as a fever. She passed through the

city, heedless of the sights and sounds around her. She felt that she had no longer a home in that place. She shrank from men's gaze and the touch of women.

It was growing late in the afternoon when she left the gardens. A new and strange activity was to be observed in the streets around her. By here and there groups of men discussed the great news, how that General von Werder himself was at Hausberge with two hundred field-pieces and many mortars to shell the northern ramparts of the city. Officers of the staff galloped recklessly through the narrow thoroughfares with despatches from the Governor to the citadel. Shopkeepers stood at the doors of their houses, and bewailed each other's misfortunes. In the air above was a tremulous suggestion of distant sounds, of the roar of heavy artillery and the intervals of silence attendant. Once a man touched her upon the shoulder and counselled her to walk beneath the eaves of the houses.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "they have killed a woman to-day in the Rue du Bain aux Plantes, Take my advice, and do not walk in the open."

She thanked him, and passed on. It was odd to be told that there was danger in the streets of that great city, to which she had fled for safety; yet neither the peril nor the warning remained in her

222 The Garden of Swords

thoughts. Again and again she heard the words which had been spoken — “ he is still in Strasburg ; he waits for you ; go to him.” Her quick imagination depicted Brandon lying there, in the darkened room, helpless, alone, perchance even suffering. For her sake he had come to Strasburg ; for her sake, to gratify her impatience, he had put his life into the hands of the man who had insulted her. And she could not reward the sacrifice. She must leave him alone still. She dare not go to the house. He had sealed her lips ; she could ask counsel of none.

This reflection of her own helplessness and of Brandon’s peril pursued her without mercy. She feared to return to the Place Kleber, where she must hear old H el ene’s platitudes, and be questioned upon the trivial events of a trivial day. She would be alone, face to face with the change that a word had brought into her life. How different, she thought, were all things yesterday. Her secret had been her own then. She had looked upon Strasburg as a refuge and a home until Edmond should return to her. The city would never be that again. All the gathering terror of the siege affrighted her. The regiments marching, the rumbling guns, the galloping horses deafened her as with crashing noises. She shrank from the excited throngs ; she feared every cry, every im-

pulse of the crowds lest they should tell of a new spy brought to justice. Yet, in her own mind, she did not doubt for an instant the fidelity or the honour of the man who wished to serve her. Brandon was no spy. He was one who had recklessly staked his own life that he might keep his promise to her. And he was in peril. She repeated the word always. An hour might bring discovery and death. She was the one friend who knew of his presence in the city; and she might not see him. What woman's logic made such a law for her she could not explain. But she held to her idea tenaciously, and, maintaining it, she turned into the square before the Minster and entered the great church itself.

There were many in the nave and chapels of the cathedral, praying at the altars for those who served France, or had died in her service. Fantastic lights streamed down through the glorious windows, and shed a lustre of crimson and green and violet upon the sunbeams which lingered yet in the first hour of evening. From without, a murmur was to be heard, as of squadrons tramping and the voices of many men. Ever and anon, even those mighty walls trembled as the thunder of the cannonade rolled heavily upon the distant horizon of hill and vineyard. But no voice was raised to mar the majestic silence within the

224 The Garden of Swords

splendid church ; and it seemed to Beatrix, as she knelt for a few moments in the chapel of St. John, that here, at least, was the abiding place of God's peace, here the haven which the city gave her no longer.

“ Oh, my God, help me — help me to save him ! ”

She had no other prayer. The vulgar dictates of prudence and the customs could not prevail in that sanctuary, where the counsel of love and sacrifice was the daily word. Gradually, as her mind began to gather up its little threads of argument, her woman's nature conquered her. She told herself that she was a coward for deserting the man whose peril was of her own making. No love, she argued, would justify a requital so base. And Brandon was an Englishman, alone there, lamed, helpless among those who would consider themselves his enemies. Well she knew that if her husband were in the city, he would be the first to go to the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel. He had no friend in all Strasburg whom he had trusted as he trusted Brandon North, the Englishman. When he heard her story, he might well charge her with the betrayal and desertion of his friend and comrade. And, she asked herself, was her own love to be the sport of every coward who chose to spy upon her ? She had shame of the thought that

The Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel 225

Gatelet's innuendos had been anything but a matter of scornful indifference to her. She would tell Edmond, when he returned, would tell him all; the debt should be repaid. And she would go to the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel. She was determined upon that now. Brandon must have a friend to help him. He might even lack common necessities. A woman's pity for one who suffered was the final argument. She left the church with beating heart, and turned her face toward the house which harboured her friend.

It was almost dark then. A lurid glow of wavering crimson light hovered in the sky to the northward and the eastward. She knew that the shells were falling there, that there lay the terror of which men spoke in hushed voices. Everywhere the people were seeking the shelter of house or café; soldiers alone moved in the deserted streets. Many of them black with powder, many fresh from the ramparts, a few drunk and reeling, they gave her coarse greeting or even laid rough hands upon her. But she continued unflinchingly, thinking always that Brandon was waiting for her, or, it might be, accusing that ingratitude which detained her. When, some little way from the cathedral, a shell struck a house above her with a great crash, and masonry fell heavily upon the pave-

226 The Garden of Swords

ment at her very feet she shrank back terrified into the porch of the house, but abated nothing of her resolution. She could hear the screams of the people in the rooms upstairs; she beheld a wrecked apartment, the walls shattered, the roof pierced, the fire raging in the *débris* — but no thought of sorrow for the people or of their necessity detained her. Rather she fled from the gaping crowd that gathered quickly in the street, for she feared that someone would follow her — some word of hers betray her errand. When she entered the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel she was trembling still with the excitement of her own escape; but a new courage came to her, and it was born of the sure knowledge that Brandon North was there, and that she was about to hear his voice again.

There was a great throng of people in the narrow street, all gathered about the shop of a chemist into which a little child had been carried some few minutes before she came there. A gossip elbowing a road for himself through the press, told her that a shell had fallen in that place, and that the child had been struck on the arm by a fragment of it.

“We shall have to go to the cellars tomorrow,” the man said grimly; “they shoot the little ones, these Prussians; they have no hearts,



“She shrank back terrified into the porch.”

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The Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel 227

Mademoiselle. I have children of my own, and I can speak for the fathers. It is not war which covers a child's frock with blood. It is the slaughter-house full of devils in blue coats. Be advised of me and return to your house, Mademoiselle."

She thanked him and asked boldly for the house of Madame Clairon. He looked at her, astonished. Her fine clothes, her grand air, the sweet girlish face she lifted when she asked the question were not to be reconciled with such a request.

"The house of Madame Clairon; but she is an *aubergiste* — she keeps the wine shop yonder. You cannot have business there, Mademoiselle."

His curiosity was now thoroughly aroused. Everyone suspected his neighbour in Strasburg at that day. What had this delicate girl to do with Madame Clairon and her house? Beatrix, on her part, found an excuse quickly.

"We have news of one of her relations in a letter from Metz, Monsieur. I did not know that it was such a house. Of course, I cannot go there."

She turned abruptly and disappeared in the throng. The questioning eyes of the man followed her as she went. She seemed to be conscious of his searching gaze as though it

228 The Garden of Swords

pursued her to read her secret and to betray it. But she saw him no more, and, as she passed the chemist's house, they carried out the child, a wan little thing with eyes very wide open and bandaged arm, and blood upon the frock. She turned from the place sick at heart. An infinite pity for the children drove the thought of her own troubles from her mind. That those little ones should suffer! The lights of the wine shop were dancing before her eyes. She saw the child's face still when she passed on into the darkness of the street.

The crowd dispersed slowly, leaving but a few idlers upon the pavement. She could not see the man who had questioned her, but suspicion of him remained. Nearly an hour passed before she returned to the *auberge*, and then she had no courage to enter it. Burly troopers, grimed with powder and half drunk, lolled everywhere about its doors. The odour of dregs and of stale tobacco, wafted even to the pavements without, made her sick and faint. She passed the doors again and again until she began to fear that her very presence was a danger to the man she would have befriended. And he was there—in that den of drink and brutality. She knew that she could not leave him in such a place.

The Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel 229

A young girl came out of the *auberge*, singing. Her arms were bare, her hair unkempt; but she gave the troopers wit for brutality, and there was a smile upon her bright face as she ran from the house. When she saw Beatrix standing there, as though about to question her, she stopped abruptly and uttered a startled exclamation.

“Ah, Mademoiselle, it is you, then!”

She turned and looked up and down the street, and then continued quickly:

“He has asked for you, oh, so many times every day. He is very ill, Mademoiselle, and has no friends in Strasburg. If anyone knew that he was an Englishman from across the Rhine, he could not stay here. But you will see him now. The door is to the right there, the first past the corner. I will let you in myself: I have done what I could, but these others — they keep me always on my feet. It is ‘Jeannette’ here and ‘Jeannette’ there, and ‘Jeannette will do it’ — and, oh, Mademoiselle, how tired I am!”

She made a gesture as of one very weary of her life, but a moment afterwards was in the café again with smiling face and with ready words for the brutes who bandied their wit against hers. When she opened the side door to Beatrix

230 The Garden of Swords

she had a candlestick in her hand, and she raised her finger warningly.

“ We must have a care, Mademoiselle. They are not all his friends as you and I. And he will be so pleased! Ah, it is good to be loved when you are ill!”

She did not see the flush on the other's face, the flush of shame and doubt and of denial, which could not well be spoken in that place. Indeed, she did not wait for assent or protest, but ran up the stairs with a child's foot, and opened the door of a garret upon the third floor. And so the friends came face to face again.

“ Ah, Monsieur — here is Mademoiselle at last. No more loneliness now, Monsieur; no more Jeannette. We are going to change all that. Shall we come in, Monsieur?”

A deep voice, clear and musical, replied to them. Beatrix entered the room with hesitating step, and stood for a little while, breathing quickly in the close atmosphere. That was the friendship of Louis Gatelet, then — that den of dirt, that hovel in the *auberge*; that garret from which even a trooper below might have turned scornfully. The very windows she saw were broken and mended with paper. The couch upon which the wounded man lay was but a bed of rags. A single candle in a dirty iron stick gave

The Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel 231

him light. The flickering rays of it showed her the pallor of his face, the thin hands, the unshaven chin. And he had been there for days, waiting for her to come to him. His friend had left him there in that garret of the city, which even a beggar would have passed by. She blamed herself that she had delayed even for an hour.

“Oh, my God, Brandon, what a place! You cannot stop here.”

He pressed her hand lightly, and made an effort to raise himself from the couch.

“That’s what I’ve been telling my leg every day for the last two days. But it differs from me. I say ‘go;’ the leg says ‘stop.’ Who is to decide when the limbs disagree?”

Jeannette set down the candle and sighed.

“Ah, Mademoiselle, if you could have seen him when he came here. That was a dreadful day. I went from the house and found him lying in the road — ah, *mon Dieu*, the dreadful wound, the pale face, the blood upon the pavement! But he will get better now. You will cure him, Mademoiselle. And you will not want Jeannette to help you. Oh — ah — I know how it is, Mademoiselle, and I will come back in an hour.”

She slipped from the room, and closed the

232 The Garden of Swords

door quietly behind her. The room possessed but one cane-seated chair, and that but half a back. Beatrix drew it to the side of the couch, while Brandon began to speak to her about his accident.

“I don't like your coming here, and yet I am glad that you came,” he said, with a look which implied the disappointment he had suffered. “Of course, you must tell somebody now, and must not come alone again. Old H  l  ne will be best. She is a good old soul, and may be prevailed upon to hold her tongue. If only I knew where Richard Watts was living, I would ask you to go to him. He has a better head than most, and would help me out of a tight place. It just shows you, Beatrix, what fools men can be sometimes. Bobbie Burns was right after all. The best laid schemes don't always hit it. There was nothing I left out of my calculations that you could think of. I had even got a safe-conduct to help me back to German lines. And then, just at the crossing here, an artillery waggon crushes my foot, and down I go like a nettle. Was there ever such a cursed piece of luck?”

He sank back again upon the pillow of rags, and a spasm of pain drew down the muscles of his mouth and made him clench his hands. She thought how greatly the wound had changed

him. His coat hung limply upon his chest; the hand that he stretched out showed awkward knuckles, and skin drawn tight; his eyes were very bright, as the eyes of one who needed sleep. But his manner was the manner of the old time. He was angry with himself because he could not conceal from her the fact that he was in pain.

"It's nothing," he said, when he saw her eyes fill with tears, and guessed how heavy was her self-reproach. "If you would n't mind pouring me out a glass of that wine — a hundred thanks; you're curing me already, you know. And, of course, I dare not send to my old rooms. Antoine, there, has a tongue as long as the Minster spire. He would give me away in five minutes. You see, there's not much chance of disguise now, Beatrix. Gatelet says he got me in here only just in time. One of the curates of St. Thomas's, who knew me well, came to the door just as they were carrying me upstairs. The fellow would have put it all over Strasburg in five minutes. It's their business to talk, and they don't neglect it. Gatelet, on the other hand, will hold his tongue just as long as it suits him. How long it will suit him I really don't know. It's a case of trusting in Providence and a fifth-rate Italian quack he unearthed from somewhere. Perhaps

234 The Garden of Swords

it will be better now that you have come. And you might find Richard Watts, eh?"

She had been very silent until that moment, for pity and dismay checked her utterances. All her impulse was to flee the house and return with someone who would carry him from that dreadful place. His very life, she thought, depended upon her, and upon her alone. She knew not what enemies of his watched this den. Even as they talked, she listened for any sound of footsteps on the stairs. The cries and oaths in the wine shop below brought back to her that picture of a man fighting for his life in the cathedral square. If it should come to that? If Gatelet should betray them?

"Brandon," she said, ignoring his question, "what did your friend mean by leaving you in this place?"

He laughed satirically.

"Oh, his magnanimity — nothing else — that's what brought me here. You could fill an egg-cup with it. By-and-by the honour of France will compel him to win glory by introducing me to the gentlemen below. They are the fellows who ran away from us at Wörth. They showed us the soles of their boots, which are made of brown paper, I believe. Here, in Strasburg, they are the very devil. When Gatelet tells them that

there is a Prussian dragoon in the garret, they will come up, three stairs at a time, with sabres in their hands. I fancy I hear them sometimes when I try to sleep. It is n't quite a cure for insomnia, and, yet, what can I do? There's no man in Strasburg, except Richard Watts, that I could trust — and, well, Watts may not be in Strasburg. Besides, the place is watched. I have seen men in the house opposite, and there is always some blackguard at the front door below. If I charged Gatelet with it, he would swell out with indignation. And, fancy owing anything to a rat like that! If only it had been someone else! Of course, he told you I was here."

"To-day," she said absently, for her brain was working quickly now; "I came straight here from the Minster. He insulted me, Brandon. I cannot speak of it. I am going now to tell Hélène. It would not be right to keep the secret any longer. If Mr. Watts is in the city, he shall know to-night. We cannot leave you one hour longer in this dreadful place. Oh, I pray God that I shall find him! My folly brought you here — nothing else, nothing else!"

She stood up and the tears fell fast and glistened upon her burning cheeks. The man thought that her tenderness for him was the sweetest thing in all the world; his love for her

236 The Garden of Swords

surged up in his heart as a consuming passion. Yet he would sooner have cut off his right hand than that she should have guessed the heavy secret of his lonely life. The unbending honour of a man who had been honour's servant from his boyhood answered her almost brusquely.

"It was not your fault at all," he said; "you don't drive artillery waggons, my dear Beatrix. And I am glad that you are going to tell old H  l  ne. She is the best woman alive when anyone is down. Perhaps she'll smuggle in some soup or something. The food here is not exactly on the restaurant scale. But don't let her trouble if she can't do it safely—and remember we are all going to write to Edmond and to tell him about this business directly it's possible. Your other letter went, I need not say. I smuggled it out all right, and he's on his way home by this time."

She looked at him, half glad, half fearful.

"You sent the letter?"

"Of course I sent it. The girl here gave it to one of the German gentlemen who are visiting Strasburg just now to take the waters—and anything else they can pick up. Edmond will give his parole, although you don't ask him. He'll be back here just as the fun is beginning. I should imagine my appearance will amuse him.

You must tell him all about it; that goes without saying. And you won't return here until he is in the Place Kleber. I insist on that, Beatrix. If anyone is to come, it must be Watts. By Jove, I should be glad to see his face, and I don't think he'd mind seeing mine."

It was the third time he had mentioned the name of the old Bohemian, and she began to see how great he believed the peril of his environment to be. There, in that wretched hovel, with the dim light of a guttering candle playing upon his haggard face, and strangers about him, and the very scum of France's soldiers in the tavern below, lamed, helpless, alone — she knew that his life hung upon a thread indeed; and she gave him of that pity which ever she bestowed upon the weak and suffering.

"They shall come and help you, Brandon. I will go and tell old Hélène. God grant that we shall not be too late."

"Amen to that, Beatrix — and a thousand thanks."

She pressed his hand lightly and left the room, groping her way down the rotting stairs to the light and voices of the city below. She told herself that she was going to save the life of her friend. But the man sank back upon his bed

238 The Garden of Swords

of rags, and, seeing the vision of her long afterwards, he thought that the sun shone upon him still; and he forgot the place and the hour, and seemed to walk with her in a house of dreams, which he had built in the years gone by.

CHAPTER XXII

“LA PAUVRE”

THERE were eighteen francs in her purse. She emptied them into Jeannette's hand as she left the tavern.

“You are a good girl,” she said; “do what you can for him. He cannot eat the food here. Go to the house of Hummel, the vintner, and buy brandy for him. We shall send to-morrow. If you think that we should come sooner, you will find me at the house of the Countess of Görsdorf in the Place Kleber. I am Madame Lefort. You may have heard my name!”

The girl raised her hands in wonder.

“Ah, Madame, if I remember! Was I not at the wedding in the Minster? *Ma foi!* what silk, what satin — and the gold of the officers. Of course, I shall be his friend. You will sleep to-night and say, ‘She is watching him.’ I have loved myself, Madame — even I, Jeannette.”

Again the scarlet flush died the pretty cheeks, and the heart of the girl beat fast.

“He is my kinsman,” she said earnestly; “his friends do not wish him to be in Strasburg. I

240 The Garden of Swords

count upon you to help him. We shall not forget your kindness. And my husband will come here himself when he returns from Ulm."

Jeannette stood with eyes wide open. The romance of her guest was gone, then. In a sense the truth was unpleasant to her. And yet, after all, she had no rival in the house. When she mounted the quaking stairs again, she went gladly and singing. The English stranger was very handsome. He should not want a friend there.

Beatrix left the house quickly, almost furtively. The errand she had set herself was an errand of life or death. The drunken troopers in the tavern stood to her for so many savage jailors of the lonely man in the garret above. The noises in the streets echoed as the cries of the doomed in a stricken city. Strange lights flared in the sky. She heard men say that they were lights of the houses which burned by the northern gates. The low booming of the artillery was incessant. It acted upon men's nerves as an irritant, moving them to frenzies of rage and despair. By here and there the chink of a cellar door showed her whole families, accustomed yesterday to the common luxuries of life, now huddled together on a bed of straw for very terror of the falling death. Others were heaping up bags full of clay before

the shutters of the shops. In the Broglie itself a man ran to and fro crying out to all that they had killed his son. He took her by the arm roughly and would have told her his story; but she tore herself away and heard the laughter of the maids of a great house, who had watched the man and found amusement in his distress. Some way further on, a child played with a paper lantern and a little tin sword while a company of half-drunken artillerymen drilled him incoherently. The men shouted after her to come and see the new Governor, who was going to open the gates to the Prussians.

She passed them by quickly, and turned into the square by the New Church. There were a great many soldiers here, both officers and privates, and they stood to watch a looming crimson cloud which quivered as with the iridescence of tremulous flame, and cast back upon the houses a golden wave of fantastic lights that showed her even the faces of the men who were gathered there. Amongst them she distinguished Gatelet, in his uniform of the National Guard. He recognised her at once, and crossed the road to speak to her. She knew that she trembled as he came, but she answered him quite frankly.

“I was coming to the Place Kleber to call upon you to-night,” he said in a low voice; “of

242 The Garden of Swords

course, you have been to see him. They told me so when I called just now."

She looked up quickly. The man had followed her from the tavern, then — had watched, she thought, while she was in the room.

"Yes," she responded with an effort; "I went there, Monsieur. Brandon was always our friend. I am under the greatest obligations to him, as is my husband —"

He made a little gesture as though the explanation was entirely supererogatory.

"Of course you went. If I had not thought that you would go, he would not be in the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel at this moment. And you will advise him to be prudent — if you are wise. They tell me that his German friends have been there. I am grieved to hear it, for, of course, we must not have complications. As far as I can be your friend, I will be so, Madame Lefort. And you will not forget that I am leaving him there for your sake."

He laid his hand upon her arm familiarly, and she could see his little eyes twinkling as the eyes of an animal. In one instant, the whole truth stood revealed to her. This man hoped to profit of his insult. She had not misread his words. The gesture, the tone of voice were those of one who deemed that he possessed already a

right indisputable thus to speak to her as no one else but her husband might in honour speak. An intense loathing of his presence came upon her. She wondered afterwards that she did not strike him upon the face. But she restrained herself for her friend's sake. The keys of life and death were in the hands of the man whose fingers touched her arm, whose breath she felt upon her cheek.

“ I shall forget nothing, Monsieur,” she said quietly ; “ while you serve my friend you serve me. Captain Lefort will tell you so when he returns.”

She released herself, and, with a curt nod to him, ran across the square to the Place Kleber. The new indignity sent her hurrying as a hurt child to its home. She had never thought or argued with such a possibility as that which was now revealed to her. It was as though her destiny had plunged her into some maelstrom of shame and darkness, from which she never might emerge again. The desire to tell someone was uncontrollable. She pictured to herself, as she went, how she would kneel at old H el ene's side and confess all, even to her infidelity to the armies of France, and her belief, which was almost a pride, in that irresistible might of the Saxon of which her friend Brandon was the type. Words of love

244 The Garden of Swords

and sympathy and help would reward her, she was sure. That sweet face would not be turned from her; that hand, which had raised the lowliest, would dry up the tears which had already dimmed the eyes of H el ene's child. There was a new hope in her heart when she turned into the square, and for the first time became aware of the terror there. The secret was done with. She was going to leave her burden in a mother's keeping.

She was hastening when she entered the square; but she stopped abruptly as her own house came to view, and chains of lead seemed to fetter her limbs. She had expected to find the Place Kleber deserted, as usually it was at such an hour; had thought to see the brightly-lighted windows, and a glimpse of her own little boudoir behind them, and of old H el ene as she sat before her writing-table in the great drawing-room. But even before she had crossed the road by the New Church she heard the clamorous voice as of a great throng, and beheld men running swiftly, and saw others who cried for ladders and for water; and, going on a little way, she was caught up as on a human wave and pressed forward to the scene until she stood before the very doors of her home, and learned, with a woman's instinct, the truth which nevermore she might forget. For the great house had been struck by a shell, and from its

upper windows flames were vomited ; and in that very boudoir, where she had found the sanctuary of life, she beheld firemen with axes, and soldiers, who tore the draperies madly, and even the women servants of the house wailing in their terror.

She had been carried to the scene swiftly, and moments went by before she could reason about it, or even ask of the people around her for news of those within the house. The little things of the instant occupied her and held her voiceless. She saw that the walls of the upper rooms had fallen to the street, leaving strange wreckage in their path. A bed hung sideways, wedged between the shattered rafters ; a cabinet in one of the rooms was smashed to atoms, but a bracket, with a vase upon it, was untouched, at the very side of the cabinet. In her own boudoir the plaster had fallen, leaving the rafters bare and splintered. She saw a man throw water from a bucket against the hangings of the alcove, and she had the impulse to run in and stay his hand. But while her eyes surveyed the whole scene swiftly, she became aware that the lower floors of the house were in darkness — and then, as in an overwhelming instant of self-reproach, she thought of *Hélène*.

“ Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur, what has happened — what are they doing in the house ? ”

246 The Garden of Swords

She forced her way now through the people, struggling as if for life itself. A *sergent de ville*, hearing her voice, began to answer her brusquely ; but when he saw her face he stretched out his hand to her, and thrust the people back.

“It is Madame H el ene’s daughter,” he said, and they made way for her, with words of sympathy uttered in low voices.

“There has been an accident, Madame — those cursed Prussians, they have destroyed your house. I would not go if I were you. There is Monsieur the Cur e, he will tell you.”

One of the ministers of the Lutheran Church of St. Thomas came up at the moment, and recognised her.

“My poor child !” he exclaimed ; “they have told you.”

“I know nothing,” she cried wildly ; “take me to H el ene ! Let me go to her !”

He put his hand upon her shoulder, and tried to hold her back.

“You must not go,” he said ; “if you will wait a moment —”

A vague consciousness of the whole truth suddenly came to her.

“Oh, my God, H el ene is dead !” she cried.

He did not answer her. She read assent in his averted face. The sound of voices magnified in

her ears. She saw the troubled faces, the shattered rooms, the looming crimson cloud above. They merged into a misty whirling scene, and so to darkness.

“ *La pauvre,* ” said one of those who looked on ;
“ she is alone in the city now.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NIGHT OF TRUCE

HÉLÈNE of Strasburg was dead, the Mother of the City, the queenly woman who had helped the city so often to courage and self-sacrifice. Though Strasburg suffered then, though her people lived no longer in the light of day but burrowed to the cellars and the vaults where no Prussian shells could harm them, they came forth as a great army of the children of night into the sunshine which hovered about the open grave. For they had loved the mistress of the house of Görsdorf, and to many of them she was as one of their own, ever to be held in the high place of memory where all that has made for the sweetness and the truth of life should be stored up.

Hélène was dead. The news went quickly as tidings of the ultimate misfortune. The soldiers on the ramparts heard it, and told each other that the day of the cataclysm was at hand. The brave men of the city took a new resolution of endurance. "We shall avenge the shell that struck down her house," they said. In the churches the priests spoke of Christian love and of

The Night of Truce 249

the divine truth that in motherhood all love is born. When the body was at length carried forth and the drums rolled and the bells tolled, it was as though the whole city came out for that *cortège*. Even the children cast flowers upon the path. The Governor himself, the dauntless Urich whose name was honoured then almost above any name in France, was first at the graveside and last to leave the stricken house when the people had gone to the darkness again.

“You must not stay here an hour, my child,” he said to Beatrix; “my house is open to you; you must be my guest. I am afraid that it is only the beginning. Their guns are reaching this quarter every day, and it is not safe even in your cellars. Besides, you are alone —”

She thanked him, but would not go.

“Hélène would have wished it,” she said. “I cannot leave her work to others. If she had lived, we should have stayed here until the end. And Edmond will expect to find me here when he returns. I could not play a coward’s part, General.”

Her resolution pleased him. Day by day it was his duty to teach the men of Strasburg the meaning of their debt to France. Here was a little English girl who needed no lesson.

“Ah,” he said, “if the others would talk like

250 The Garden of Swords

that! I shall tell your story at the Council to-day. Madame Lefort remains in the Place Kleber! They will be ashamed, my child, and you — you will not do anything foolish. I will send some men up to make your house safe. After all, we are becoming night birds now. And there is no Madame Hélène to tell us our duty. I am grateful to you for doing wrong, Madame, but if you wish it — ”

“Hélène would have wished it,” she repeated; “how could I meet my husband when he comes back if I were faithless to her memory? And I shall be less alone here, General, than in another house. If it is possible for the dead to counsel us, Hélène will help me still. I seem to hear her voice always in my sleep. I know that she hears me when I speak to her!”

He shook his head. The philosophy of life was of less concern to him than the facts of life.

“I will not gainsay Hélène’s wish,” he exclaimed, “but it will be a life in the cellars, my child. Don’t forget that. If we are to save Strassburg, all must suffer, even the women.”

“Do the women complain, then, General?”

“Complain — God send that the men show half their courage!”

“Then do not let me be the exception to your rule. If Edmond should come back — ”

The Night of Truce 251

He laughed doubtfully.

“He will never give his parole, Madame, even for the sake of the bravest heart in Strasburg. And you would not wish it. It is a dishonour. There have been too many victims of that shame already. I would cut off my right hand before setting my name to such a promise as that. When your husband comes back, the war will be over and the Prussians across the Rhine. You help me to that day by remaining at the Place Kleber.”

He left her with the promise, alone in the great house with the shattered rooms and the bulging walls and the roof of tarpaulin which builders had dared to carry for old Hélène's sake. In the streets about her the crash of bursting shell and falling building ceased not by night or day. Even from the great deserted rooms through which she passed as a figure of solitude, she could see the *débris* of ruined houses and forgotten homes. But the city's distress was not her distress. For her own life she had ceased to care. The lonely man in the tavern of the troopers was always in her thoughts. Her secret had become a burden intolerable. When, on that night of terror, she ran from them into the burning house and knelt at the side of her whose voice she nevermore would hear, the prayer on her lips was a prayer of that confession she had wished so ardently to

252 The Garden of Swords

make. There was no other in all the city to whom she could go and say—Help me to save my friend. It was left to her to give Brandon life or death. Her own folly and thoughtlessness had brought this as her recompense.

She was alone in the great house, alone with her secret. Few came to her, for there was peril to life in the streets, and ever arose that deafening music of the guns, that thunder of tumultuous sounds which spoke of a city crumbling to the dust, of a people living below the ground, of flames leaping to the crimson heavens, of passion and death and a nation's despair. There was scarce another voice that she heard save the voice of Guillaumette, who trembled in the cellars and shrieked aloud as the shells fell with a great flame of light and the homes of the children for their victory. Her friends—they had all found shelter of the darkness and the earth, or had fled Strassburg to give the story to the valleys and the lakes of Switzerland. None whose business was not of the city's safety ventured then to look upon the sun or even to tell the stars in the quivering sky. Troopers alone passed her when she ventured from the lonely house. Yet venture she must, for the dead seemed to walk the empty rooms; and often in the silence she heard her friend's voice reproaching her.

The Night of Truce 253

Seven days had passed now since she had seen Brandon, or heard the news of him. The death of Hélène (of heart disease, the doctors said, and charged it to the devastation of the house) had forbidden all thought of her errand of mercy and of friendship. She had desired so greatly to confess her friend's peril, and to send a message of hope to the house; but this new blow stunned her mentally and physically. She knew not even whether Brandon were in the city or no. She thought sometimes that his presence must have been discovered; and she would see him, in her troubled sleep, as she had seen that other in the café by the Minster. The suspense was an agony almost insupportable. She prayed every day that Edmond would come back; and yet she judged instinctively that he would never come until the end. When the General confirmed her view she was glad to hear him. Edmond might judge her afterwards for that which she had done of her own free will. She remembered that she had not asked him to give his parole, and therein found content.

There was a great sortie from the city on the morning of the 1st of September, and all day she heard the booming artillery, and the moan of the shells as they hurtled above the now doomed northern quarter. Towards noon the stragglers

254 . The Garden of Swords

came in, and told of many dead at Kronburg and Königshofen. She saw the waggons of the ambulance passing through the square to the military hospital, and anon the Abbé Colot came to tell her that there was to be a short truce while the burial parties went out. Soon the news of the truce went abroad as tidings of day, and men and women crept from the cellars and came gladly into the sunlight; and even the cafés were filled, and the accustomed movement of a city was to be observed again. She watched the people for a little while, and then put on her hat and cloak and went some way towards the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel. She must know the truth, she thought; must know if Brandon were still in Strasburg.

Dusk had come down when she entered the street. Hordes of ragged soldiers told the story of the unsuccessful sortie of the morning. Every alley had its philosopher. Some cursed the General for the city's tribulations. Others said that France was justified of her army; that further resistance was a crime against the army. All were too excited by their own needs and creeds to observe her as she stood at the corner and looked up at the window behind which she hoped to see her friend's face. But there was no light or sign there; the house had no message for her.

The Night of Truce · 255

An hour passed all too slowly. She returned to her watching place to find the *auberge* again in darkness. Anticipations of the worst troubled her. She remembered how curtly she had left the man Gatelet, when last he met her by the New Church. If he had told them! But, after all, Brandon might have escaped. His German friends might have helped him to cross the river and regain his own lines. She was just telling herself that this was possible when the girl Jeannette came out of the house, and, observing her, crossed the road with furtive steps.

“Ah, Madame, it is you, then. And he has waited so. Every day, every hour, he has asked for you! You cannot be his friend, Madame, to leave him there —”

“He is still in your house, then, Jeannette?”

“If he is in the house, Madame! Listen: there have been many to ask for him, but I have told none. He has enemies in Strasburg. They watch us often from the windows *là-haut*. He does not light his lamp, because they can see him at the blind. It is darkness, always, always. And I have spent the money. Every franc, and for myself not a sou, Madame. He will tell you so when you go up. Ah, if he were my friend, the steps would not be many. You are going up, Madame?”

256 The Garden of Swords

For an instant she hesitated; but the thought of the lonely man up there in the darkness prevailed above the last argument of prudence.

“I am going up, Jeannette,” she said.

The girl took her hand, as though to lead her to the house. She pressed it in her own fingers, so thin and cold.

“Ah, Madame, you have a brave heart. Wait until I light the candle. And we will not mind those others to-night. Oh, how glad he will be, Madame!”

Together they climbed the tortuous dirty staircase and stood at the broken door. Some instants passed before their knock was answered, and when they entered, the prisoner started up as though from a fitful sleep. There was the pallor of death upon his face, but he smiled as he held out his hand to her.

“Well,” he said; “I thought that I told you not to come.”

“You knew that I must come,” she said quietly. “Hélène is dead, or I should have been here before. A shell struck our house; she died of fright and grief.”

He took her hand and pressed it.

“My poor child!” he said.

They sat in silence for a little while, until Jeannette had covered the windows with a heavy

cloth, which shut out the memory of those who watched the house. Beatrix was the first to speak, and her words came quickly, as the words of one who had no time to lose.

“You know that they are watching you here, Brandon?”

“I have known it from the first.”

“And you must find some other house.”

He answered with an assumed indifference. “My foot says no, and my landlady agrees. Why do you think of me when you have troubles of your own, Beatrix?”

“Because I must. You cannot stay here, Brandon. I had hoped that Edmond would come back, but I know that he will not come. What he would have done for you I must do. If there is any friend of yours in Strasburg, he must help you. There can be no secrets now. Your life may depend upon to-morrow.”

He listened to her eagerly.

“Antoine, my clerk,” he explained, “has become a *franc-tireur*. If I sent to him for money, he would shoot me. Mardon, the banker, would go straight to the citadel with my story if I told him. You know what the others are, men in blue coats mostly, who prate about the honour of the army, and have no honour to spare for their friends. If money were to be had, that would make one diffi-

258 The Garden of Swords

culty the less. It's no good mincing matters, Beatrix. I have n't a shilling to my name. The old woman here will turn me out into the street, bag and baggage, to-morrow, if I don't pay. Of course, Gatelet knows that. He whines about friendship, and will come and remind you of that friendship when his fellows below have cut my throat. He knows that I have no money, and that is his trump card. If only old Watts could be found, the game would go well enough. But I don't think you'll find him now. If your friendship for me prompts you to settle with that hag downstairs, that will be a real service, and I can settle with Edmond when he comes in. Meanwhile, there is no time to lose."

He sank back on his couch exhausted. She saw that there was not even water upon the table, and she sent Jeannette hurrying for wine and brandy. His words had been an inspiration to her. If money could save him, her task was indeed a light one.

"Why did you not ask me before?" she said. "You know that I have never wanted money. Of course, we will pay the woman at once. It has been such a dreadful week, Brandon; even death does not seem the sorrow it should be when there are so many terrible things happening every

The Night of Truce 259

day. While you are here I shall know no rest. If you could find one friend — ”

“There are many, Beatrix, but they don't come to Strasburg to see me. Their business is of another kind. I would not let you enter this room if I were on that errand. You know why I ventured in, and you may tell Edmond when he returns.”

“I pray God that he will understand,” she said gently.

He turned his face away. When she left him, ten minutes later, she said that she would not rest night or day until she found someone to befriend him. But he buried his face in the pillow of rags, and alone and in the darkness he thought that none had come between them; and he seemed to hold her in his strong arms and to tell her that his life was nothing to him, because he might not speak of his surpassing love for her.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ULTIMATUM

SHE slept but fitfully that night, nor did she take any thought of rest. The new silence which had fallen upon the city in the hour of truce was for her an armistice of the mind. No longer might she hope for help or consolation from another. Brandon's life was in her keeping. Her own friendship for him was not to be analysed or weighed up at such a time. She must save him, she said, and dawn must lead her to the task.

It was strangely silent in the city, and heavy black clouds loomed where the crimson pall had been. She heard the rain pattering upon the boards which defended the windows of the house; and ever and anon a distant bugle reminded her of those who watched in the fields of the unburied dead. But sleep was far from her eyes. Pacing that lonely room, her thoughts were not for Strasburg or those who suffered there. Sometimes she would recall those happy hours in the Niederwald when Edmond had held her in his arms and they had known the sweetest first-fruits of love unquestioning. How long ago that day

seemed! Yet she could kneel still at her bedside and witness before God the truth and fidelity of the love she had given. A great longing to be taken back to her husband's arms was the supreme thought of her night. She loved him so faithfully. He would never fail to understand her. If only he were in Strasburg, they would go to the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel together, and there would be no more peril for her friend. She was sure that she owed all she had done to her friendship for a fellow-countryman who had risked his life that she might have news of Edmond's safety. She could not conceive the ingratitude which would leave her friend to the death of the streets, the death which she had witnessed in the café of the Minster.

The passionate desire for Edmond's return was, indeed, ever joined to that ceaseless thought for Brandon's safety. The terrible week, which had struck down the one being in Strasburg at whose side she might have knelt to tell her strange story, had made of her, she remembered, a rich woman almost beyond her knowledge. That was no day for the thought of bequests and wealth; yet even during the stress and distraction of siege, old Dolomot, the advocate, had come to speak of her inheritance, and had dwelt upon the new position she soon must take in the city. She had not reflected upon the

262 The Garden of Swords

power of money before that day, but now a great idea came to her—the idea of a woman who sees no side-issues but rejoices already in a scheme new-made. She would purchase Brandon's life, she resolved. She cared not what price, she must pay. The men who lurked about the tavern—their lips should be sealed. She would buy silence and help—even from Gatelet, who was as poor as any captain of National Guards might be. And to that end she must have money. Old Dolomot would find it for her, and she would go to his house when day came. The morrow must send messengers to every quarter of the city for Richard Watts. Hope had saved Brandon already. She slept at dawn with hope for her dreams.

The truce of night was over when she quitted her house very early in the morning and set out to find Maître Dolomot. She could hear the guns booming again, and often a terrible sound of buildings falling, so that the very ground quaked beneath her feet and the whole city quivered with the impact. The fresh breezes of the day came to her choked with dust and sour with the acrid odours of gunpowder. She could see the smoke of fires against which the summer rain had warred in vain. Few civilians trod the streets of the northern suburbs, nor

was there any sign of life except in the churches, towards which women turned tremblingly, as though the houses of God might defy the terror. At intervals some scene of surpassing desolation compelled her to remember the German oath that not one stone of Strasburg should stand upon another. She beheld acres of rubbish and dust which yesterday had been mansions of renown. Vast ruins vomited flame and smoke as though funnels of the very pit of hell. Ambulances passed her only to give visions of stricken faces and bloody clothes.

From this place of death and darkness she passed quickly to the safer streets and the southern arrondissement. There were people abroad here — timorous men who denounced the folly of the siege and cursed the name of Uhrich the brave; women, who spoke of their troubles and their hunger; little children, playing in the gutter, oblivious of the peril hurtling above them. One poor creature, driven from her home by a shell, ran to and fro distractedly with her babe in her arms. She called God to witness that the babe was dead; but the onlookers laughed at her, for they could hear the little one's voice, and for the frenzy of fear they had no pity. Such gunners and *mobiles* as walked the streets were begging drink-money of the

264 The Garden of Swords

people. Beatrix sought to pass through them unobserved ; but they swarmed about her threateningly, and when she threw down her purse they fought for it, with savage cries and bayonets drawn. She could still hear their voices when she turned into the Rue St. Thomas and rang at Maître Dolomot's door.

Twice she rang at the great brass bell, but no one answered her. A lad, playing in the street before the solicitor's door, told her there was no one in the house. She rang a third time, and knocked loudly and repeatedly. Slow to believe that fortune had played her this new trick, she lingered about the place, gazing up at gloomy blinds and the smokeless chimneys. Her great idea ebbed away while she waited. In a sudden rush of fear, she remembered that Brandon must settle with the woman to-night. And she must have money. His life was the price of defeat.

Again and again she repeated the truth, as quick steps carried her back to the Place Kleber and to her house. Child-like, she began to say that surely there was one man in Strasburg who would take pity upon her. The Abbé Colot, she knew, was her friend. She would go to him now, on the instant, and tell him her story. He would help her. He was a priest and would keep her

secret. She remembered that his house was not a stone's throw from that very church of St. Thomas whose roof she could see above the buildings. Thither she turned with new hope, but had gone but a little way upon her errand when a hand was laid lightly upon her shoulder, and, hesitating, she found herself face to face with the last man in all Strasburg she would have wished to meet. For Gatelet stood before her; and there was that on his face which betrayed a knowledge of her errand.

"Ah," he said curtly, "you are surprised, Madame."

"And why, Monsieur?"

"Because of many things. Maître Dolomot, for instance, has gone to Geneva."

"Is not that my business?"

"Not at all. It is the business of those who safeguard the honour of the city, Madame. We must have a little talk, you and I. Let us sit at the café, here. There is too much noise in Strasburg to fear eavesdroppers. And I want to talk to you very much, little Beatrix —"

She turned on him, flushing at his unabashed familiarity.

"How dare you?" she said.

He ignored her anger, and stalked into the café, setting a chair for her at one of the little

266 The Garden of Swords

marble tables. A waiter came up and asked for orders.

“Let me prescribe a glass of brandy. You are not well this morning, Madame.”

She shook her head, but sat down, pulling excitedly at her glove. She knew that she must listen to this man. He, in turn, gauged exactly the measure of his power over her.

“Come,” he said, “do not be angry with me. We are friends together, in a good cause. If I were not your friend, I should not be here this morning. On the contrary, I should be in the Rue—but no names, my dear, they are not necessary—let us say that I should be telling my friends to go and see the young man whose foot was crushed by an artillery waggon. You would not like that—eh? Well, be reasonable, then, and listen to what I have to say.”

A murmur of assent escaped her lips. The pallor of death was on her face. The ungloved hands showed blue veins outstanding as upon a hand of clay.

“What do you want me to do, Monsieur?” she asked in a low voice.

He bent over the table, and whispered the words in her ear.

“To be my friend, little Beatrix.”

She rose from the table.

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“The Frenchman . . . reeled back across the table.”

“You are a coward,” she said quickly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“There is no cowardice in love. Do not agitate yourself, my dear. I will give you time to think it over. You shall tell me to-night. To-day they want me at the barracks; but I am coming back by-and-by, and if you do not wish to be my friend, we shall go to the Rue—ah, no names, Madame, no names yet—”

He rose also, for he thought that she was about to faint. The touch of his hand seemed to burn her wrist. She uttered a loud cry, and strove to release herself.

“Do not make a scene, Madame; and remember, I must have your answer to-night.”

She had no voice to respond; but another, a man who crossed the road quickly when he heard her cry, answered for her.

“Take that, and be damned to you,” he said.

The Frenchman, struck heavily upon the face, reeled back across the table. But Beatrix fell sobbing into into the arms of Richard Watts.

CHAPTER XXV

CONFESSION

THE arm which now held her was an arm of iron. She was conscious of a great hubbub going on about her: of angry voices and hurrying feet, and a gabble of words which deafened her. Once she saw Gatelet, held back by strong hands; she heard Richard Watts telling those who came up to the café that the daughter of Madame Hélène had been insulted in the place. But of the rest she remembered little, except that the same strong arm led her quickly from the scene, and that she passed through narrow streets, unfamiliar to her, and was taken at length into some house, and into a little sitting-room there. When she asked where she was, an English voice answered her, and an English hand held a glass of wine to her lips.

“In the house of those that will take care of you, my dear—and, not a word until you have drunk every drop; not a word, lady.”

She obeyed willingly, and looked up to see a kindly old dame, in a white cotton dress, spotlessly clean, and wearing a bonnet which recalled the

lanes of England. Richard Watts himself, standing at the dame's side, watched her approvingly. Everything in that light and airy room was English — the substantial buffet, the guns on the walls, the pictures of hunting scenes, the great flagons of silver. But the gentle face of the woman was the most typical English thing of all.

“How good you are to me!” Beatrix said, again and again; “how good it is to hear an English voice!”

Old Richard Watts cried “Bravo!”

“English voices, English hands — that 's it, young lady. Stand by that and you 'll never come to any harm. Eh, Anne Brown, is the little passenger to stand by that? English voices and English hands — gad's truth, it 's there in a sentence — the whole of it.”

He walked to and fro, cracking his fingers excitedly; but the old dame continued to say, “God bless me!” as she had said ever since her master brought so strange a guest to the house.

“In a café? My word! And a Frenchman insulting her; oh, my dear, my dear, that we should hear such things!”

Richard Watts took up the story, and told it again enthusiastically.

“I was going to see if there was anything left to eat in this city of half-bricks except *pâté de foie*

270 The Garden of Swords

gras, child. If you had n't cried out, I'd never have seen you, for I'm as blind as a bat. Then I heard your voice, and looked up. 'It's the little passenger, by gad,' I said. The rest concerned the Frenchman. He was insulting you, eh? Listen to that, Anne Brown; he insulted her. He asked for her answer. I gave it him, old girl — he is reading it now. And lucky I thought of her name. They would have torn us to pieces, the pair of us. But I remembered. Trust old Dick Watts, who has the devil of a memory for names. He remembered. 'It's old Héléne's daughter,' he said. And they stood by us — gad's truth, they stood by us."

He helped himself to a glass of wine, and drank it at a gulp. Beatrix, still hot and flushed, and scarce knowing what she did, rose and thanked him once more.

"I can never be grateful enough," she said; "and I must not intrude upon you."

Richard Watts laughed heartily.

"Intrude — listen to that, Anne Brown; the little passenger intrudes."

"'T would be a poor house where you could intrude, miss," said the old housekeeper decisively. "Let the master send a word to your home, and tell your friends what has happened. We are not going to part with you yet. You're in no fit state

to walk anywhere, I'm sure, and as for carriages, God bless me, how many days is it since I saw one in this street?"

Beatrice answered them in a low voice.

"I have no friends," she said; "there is no one to be anxious about me. It is something else — I cannot tell you — I wish to God I could."

A great sense of loneliness and of her own terrible day overcame her, and she sank into one of the chairs by the table and burst into a flood of passionate weeping. That which no Frenchman in Strasburg could wring from her was to be told in this room, where English friends watched her with tears in their eyes, and everything recalled the home she had lost and the faces in that England she would look upon no more.

"I cannot tell you — I must not tell you," she repeated again and again as the gentle arms of the woman were about her neck and a mother's voice besought her to trust them. But she told them in the end, word by word, confessing all — Brandon's danger, his presence in the city; Gatelet's threat that he would betray him that very night. And when she had done, it was as though some great load of her life had been transferred suddenly to another's shoulders, and must be borne, as a feather-weight, henceforth, by this giant English-

272 The Garden of Swords

man, who had come out of the city's night in the hour of her necessity.

Richard Watts heard the story, sentence by sentence, often taking her back a little way in the narrative; always ready with his word of sympathy and encouragement. A quick thinker, he grappled with the situation instantly. It was not her friend that he was called upon to save, but his own — the man he had left at Wörth; the man whose father he had known at Frankfort twenty years ago.

“It was like the mad scamp to come here,” he said, when she told him of Brandon's first visit; “he should n't have done it. The news would have waited. But war breeds folly. We must save him from that folly, little lady. Do you think that the scoundrel down yonder has told anyone else?”

She shook her head, smiling through her tears.

“I have been too frightened to think, Mr. Watts.”

“Of course you have. It was his game to frighten you. I don't suppose he's taken anyone into partnership, all the same. That would n't suit him. But he'll tell all he knows about Brandon now, be sure of it. And we have n't much time to lose, my child.”

She could see that he was very thoughtful. For

a little while she did not venture to speak to him, as he paced the room silently, often taking up his hat, and as often setting it down again. She knew that the danger of that which he undertook was not hidden from him.

“If anything should happen to you!” she exclaimed suddenly.

“To me, young lady. Oh, don’t bother your head about that. I’m an Englishman; they won’t hurt me.”

“And you think that you can save Brandon?”

“Ah, that’s another question.”

She shuddered.

“My God, if they should discover him — those men who killed the German in the café.”

“We must see that they do not, little passenger.”

He put on his hat and went to the door; but upon the threshold he turned and asked her yet another question:

“I shall find you at the Place Kleber to-night?”

“Yes; I am going home now.”

“Then, if the news is good, I will come there at six o’clock.”

He closed the door behind him and went out. The old dame brought her a bowl of soup. She took a few sups of it, and made some excuse. Already she had begun to count the minutes of waiting.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

SHE returned to the Place Kleber at four o'clock ; nor would she listen to the old housekeeper's entreaty to defer her departure until Richard Watts came in with his news. The vague hope that some tidings of her husband might be brought into the city at any moment put chains upon her feet when she had to go abroad, and sent her always hurrying gladly to her home again. For the danger in that northern quarter she had no thought. Soldiers warned her as she crossed the streets which civilians had forsaken. She thanked them, but did not pause. The crashing echoes of terrible sounds could not affright her. She would have faced any peril to read a word from the man she loved. The remembrance that Edmond's letter might be lying unopened in the lonely house could compel her often to return there excitedly, as though her troubles would be ended by a miracle. But there was no letter lying there when she returned on that memorable day ; and such news as Guillaumette vouchsafed was news of the terror and of her own apprehensions.

The Light in the Window 275

“ We cannot stay here, Madame ; there is another house struck to-day. Maitre Bolot and his children have gone to the cellars. I shall die of fright. All night long the boum, boum, boum. Ah, Madame, if one were a rabbit to live under the ground ! There will be no Place Kleber soon — Henri says so. ‘ Let your mistress go to the General’s house,’ he says. *Mon Dieu*, there are men in the General’s house — but here — ”

She wrung her hands distractedly and stood in the gloomy hall, a very picture of woe. Through the shattered ceiling the cloudy sky was to be seen far above ; and drops of rain even then pattered upon the once fine carpet. Beatrix stood an instant to look up at the broken walls of that which a month ago was her little sanctuary. She could see her pictures still hanging there, but the wind and the wet had soaked the curtains, and plaster had hardened upon the pretty case of her cottage piano. No one, the masons told her, must venture upon that staircase now. The house was not safe, they said. If another shell were to strike it, a crumbling heap of ruins would mark its site as they marked the site of many a princely house in Strasburg that day. Yet to her it was a home still. There, for the first time, Edmond had called her wife. There was no nook of it that did not seem to whisper some story of her

276 The Garden of Swords

love. Thither he would return for love of her. She was resolute in her determination to keep her trust while one stone stood upon another.

“It will not be for long, Guillaumette. Monsieur will come back, and then we shall go away. There are others in Strasburg who have not even a roof to shelter them. Remember that when Henri tells you his tales. Only children fear the darkness.”

“Not so, Madame. Henri does not fear the darkness at all. That is for me. You cannot see their arms in the dark. *Ma foi!* one prays God not to send Gaspard back from the wars. You have had *déjeuner*, Madame?”

“All that I want, Guillaumette. There is no letter for me?”

“A letter— who should write a letter, Madame?”

“And no one has been to the house?”

“Henri came at twelve o'clock to say that you were to go to the General's house. He thinks about you always, Madame. There is no one else.”

Beatrix entered the dreary dining-room with a sigh. Great beams buttressed the ceiling of it; the windows were heavily boarded up so that little rays of light, stealing in through many a chink, showed lustrous dust as a room long barred to the

The Light in the Window 277

sun. Everywhere about the chamber were those necessaries of the daily life which spoke eloquently of the dead. An open book with a note upon the margin in old Hélène's handwriting—a list of the ambulances with names of the poorer sufferers; a half-written letter, a ball of wool, the last copy of the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin*. Above the mantelshelf there was a large oil painting of Marie Douay, old Hélène's child. Her mother's was a plaintive, wayward face, Beatrix thought as she gazed upon it. Her father had loved that face, but the mind behind it had never been linked to his. His English prejudices had wrecked his life. Racial antipathy, forgotten in the hour of passion, had revived in the sombre atmosphere of domestic monotony. Beatrix remembered that she, too, had married one who looked with contempt upon the England she loved. She asked herself if, when these dreadful days were forgotten and peace should build her a house again, the story of the father must be told again by the child. It was but the reflection of a moment, a passing thought born in that gloomy room. She put it away from her resolutely, and, crossing the darkened chamber, she knelt before Edmond's portrait and kissed it passionately. The barrier which her own forebodings had put between them was broken now that another shared her secret. She desired her

278 The Garden of Swords

husband's return ardently. She had nothing to conceal from him. If only her friend were saved, she thought that she could remember this war as some chastening epoch of her life, which had permitted her to look into the book of her affections and to read there, without fear, of that which was written — if only her friend were saved.

It was her secret no more, and yet it pursued her relentlessly, even there at the Place Kleber. Alone in the silent room she almost counted the seconds as the pendulum in the old clock numbered them. Every sound in the street was the omen of message for her. She could find no employment to which she might put her hand. The open piano mocked her as she listened to the rolling music of the shells and the shivering chords of the great guns' victories. When she looked out from the staircase window of the house the same melancholy scene ever rewarded her eyes. Whole acres, which were streets and churches and markets a month ago, were now but rubble for the builder's cart. She could see the wind-tossed flames rising up above the ruined north; her imagination depicted for her a people living below the earth for fear of the death which was everywhere above them. Hunger, want, poverty, terror, anger — the whole gamut of the passions might be struck in such an hour. And yet Strasburg did not yield.

The Light in the Window 279

Black and bloody, mourning its dead every day, shaken to its very foundations, threatening soon to become the dust of that earth from which it had arisen—the heart of the city remained its own. “Until the last stone,” the Governor had said. That day could not be distant, Beatrix thought.

Richard Watts had promised to bring her news of Brandon at six o'clock, but the bells struck the hour, and again the half-hour, and there was no message from him. For a long while she waited, the victim of doubt intolerable, and of a presentiment she could not seek to justify. As the minutes passed, her conviction became more sure. The old Bohemian had failed her, she said. He had gone to the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel to find that Brandon was no longer there—perhaps even to learn of his death. The man Gatelet was not one to forgive. There was no reason why he should not have betrayed her friend. She hoped for no clemency for him. At seven o'clock she told herself that Brandon certainly was dead, and that Watts feared to come with an admission of his failure. She could endure the doubt no longer, but putting on her hat, and caring nothing for the heavy rain which hissed upon the burning city, she ran to the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel, and did not pause until she stood at the tavern door.

280 The Garden of Swords

There were few in the street, for the storm had driven even the troops to shelter. In the tavern itself the bright light shone upon many faces — the faces of men weary with service at the guns; the faces of countrymen sodden with wine and wet; the faces of traitors declaiming in drunken frenzy against those who did not drive the Germans from the gates. A few women, whose coarse finery was as some dissolute echo of the forgotten day of peace, laughed in discordant keys, or gave the notes of ribald songs. Everywhere the enormity of the night appeared to have driven such as ventured from their homes to riot and debauchery. Men struck each other in the tavern and were applauded by their comrades. A loutish gunner, whom wine had robbed of his wits, was thrown into the gutter, and lay there with the rain beating upon his face. Mob orators stood upon stools and prated of the glories of the siege. A fiddler struck up the notes of the “*Mourir pour la Patrie*,” while a hussy bawled incessantly, “*Vive l’armée — l’armée !*” Presently the “*Marseillaise*” was sung by many throats hoarse and discordant. A man threw a wine flask through one of the glass windows. The café would have been wrecked but for the appeals of an old soldier, who had lost an arm at Worth, and whose voice spoke as eloquently as his wound.

The Light in the Window 281

Such was the scene upon the ground floor of the *auberge* — a scene in striking contrast to the dark and gloomy windows above. There was no light in any bedroom of the house, nor any sign of life there. Beatrix even could take heart when she beheld the unlighted windows of the garret wherein Brandon had been a prisoner. After all, Richard Watts had good news for her. She did not doubt that he had contrived her friend's escape. Possibly Brandon was at that moment a prisoner in his house, with old Anne Brown for his jailor, and an English home for his cell. She took great courage of the conviction, and was about to return to the Place Kleber, full of the expectancy of good tidings, when a window in the house by which she stood was opened suddenly, and the head of a soldier peered out into the night. Instinctively she crouched back against the shutters of the shop; and so standing she observed the man; while he, in turn, gazed steadfastly at the unlighted windows opposite, and then answered a question asked by someone invisible in the room behind him.

“The Englishman has left, François?”

“There is no light there, M'sieur.”

“Of course, there would be no light. We shall catch the pair of them. Why does not he come? It was for eight o'clock.”

282 The Garden of Swords

“Well, they are ready in the café. Shall I send for Benoît, M’sieur?”

He did not wait for the response, but shut the window with a crash. To Beatrix the few words were as a sentence of doom pronounced against her friends. Richard Watts had failed, then. He and Brandon were over there in the garret together. The house was watched. Those who watched it were waiting for some signal to begin their work. She imagined readily that Gatelet was the one who delayed. She remembered that he had spoken of the need of his presence at the citadel. They must have detained him there, she thought. It was an intolerable, enduring agony to stand out there in the wet and the cold, and to tell herself that the last two friends she possessed in Strasburg might die when a few minutes had passed. What to do she knew not. Her first impulse was to enter the house by the side door and to confess all she had heard and seen. But when she emerged from the shadows and crossed the street, she found a sentry pacing the alley, and his bayonet was fixed upon his rifle. She saw the man without surprise, for she expected to find him there. But the reality of his presence was as some final crushing blow. She did not move from the place where first she had perceived him. The vision of that scene in the café before

The Light in the Window 283

the Minster doors came to her with a vividness as of the moment of its happening. Brandon was to die, then, as that other had died. This was the end of their folly.

The sentry paced the alley with slow steps. Sometimes he would lean wearily against the door of the house; at other times he went a little way out into the street to look up at the unlighted windows above. He did not see that the girl watched him, for she stood at the corner of the street, and he had eyes only for the tavern. Once, indeed, an exclamation escaped his lips, and he crossed the alley and remained for quite a long time gazing up at the attics. A light, appearing suddenly in Brandon's room, warned him to the action. Beatrix saw the light, too, and the shadows it cast upon the blind. They were the shadows of Brandon and of Richard Watts. She had no longer a doubt. Her friends were in the house. She was impotent to help them. A cry of hers would bring the drunkards from the café leaping as devils to the work. She could but stand and wait—God knew for what horror of that September night.

The light remained in the window, it may have been for twenty minutes; but the shadows of the men vanished instantly. It seemed to Beatrix that hours of suspense passed before

284 The Garden of Swords

there was any new movement in the street ; yet she knew that she had waited there but a little time, for she heard the church clock strike nine, and she could see that the candle in the room above had burned down but a little way in its stick. As the moments passed and the suspense became almost insupportable, she began to pace the street again ; telling herself that now the end was coming ; or listening for footsteps upon the pavement ; or seeking to read some message of hope upon the golden blind. Always with her was the sure and torturing knowledge that she could do nothing for those who had done so much for her. In all Strasburg there was no friend who would help those friends of hers. The very blinding rain which still fell upon her burning face was as some truth of the pitiless night. Brandon must die — there in the garret. She did not ask herself why the peril in which this man stood could move her to such agonies of distress. He was to die. She had seen another die at the Minster doors, and he had been a stranger. But this man was her friend, almost her brother — one of her own race. In that moment she knew that her heart lay wholly in the England she had left, and that never again would a sentiment born of passion mislead her to a hope in France and a desire for kinship with its people.

The Light in the Window 285

As ten o'clock was struck by all the bells of Strasburg, a man riding a black horse came down the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel at a canter. She recognised him as Gatelet, and she saw him enter the house where the watchers were concealed. Anon, three men came out of the house together and crossed over to the tavern. She knew why they had gone, and she stood as a figure of stone while their loud talking was heard even in the street. Presently a roar of voices answered their appeal. Troopers in a frenzy of drunken passion came running out of the house to cry that there was a spy in the garret above. A woman, with a besom dipped in resin for a torch, began to sing the "Marseillaise." Others who had not been in the tavern were drawn from the neighbouring houses to make a great press now swarming before the doors of the *auberge*. A young officer of artillery climbed a pillar and cried incessantly "*À la lanterne.*" Others demanded that the tavern should be fired. Inside the house itself a terrible uproar was to be heard. Men fought upon the narrow stairs as dogs for a bone. Windows were opened in the street, and new cries for tidings swelled the clamour. Mounted troopers rode up to the alley and besought those inside to throw the spy down to them. In the garret itself there were many lights, and many figures upon

286 The Garden of Swords

the blind until a strong hand tore it down and an elbow shivered the glass behind it. The very pit of hell seemed opened there. The mob swayed to and fro, delirious with anger and the desire of death.

Beatrix had been caught up in the press, and was thrust forward toward that door which she had passed with such hesitation but a few days ago. The roar of the multitude was as the song of the sea in her ears. She saw a vision of devilish faces upturned; of savage men brandishing knives and swords and any weapons that came to their hand; of a window bright with many lights, and of figures moving there. She heard men say that the German was taken; terrible sounds of glass-breaking and of the oaths of the frenzied troopers rent her ears as the voices of tempest. She tried to utter an appeal for mercy, but no words left her lips. Her friend was dead, she thought. He had paid with his life for their jest upon the field of Wörth.

And so she ran from the place as the flames of the burning tavern added their mite to the sea of fire which surged above the doomed city, and warned those who looked upon Strasburg from afar that the day of waiting was drawing to its end.



“Savage men brandishing knives and swords.”

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CHAPTER XXVII

ACCUSATION

GUILLAUMETTE opened the door to her, and stood exclaiming upon the threshold —

“Madame — oh, Madame!”

“Let me pass, Guillaumette — I am very ill and my clothes are wet.”

“But — Madame — oh, *mon Dieu!* and Monsieur has come back.”

Beatrix shut the door quietly. The draughts through the broken ceiling of the hall played with the gas-jet there, and cast a garish, fitful light upon the faces of the women. From the dining-room there came the echo of voices. Men were talking in the room, and one of them was Edmond Lefort.

“He came back an hour ago, Madame; he would not eat or sit until you were here. And now the Captain Gatelet is with him — and you — Holy Virgin!”

She wrung her hands, and tears came into her eyes as she looked upon the pale face and trembling hands and sodden clothes of her mis-

288 The Garden of Swords

dress. But Beatrix did not hear her. For an instant she hesitated, cold and faint and dizzy in the hall. The words "Edmond is here" were exquisite beyond any words she had spoken in all her life. Out of the darkness and the place of death she had come back there to this reward — to her lover's arms.

Maladroitly, yet with eager fingers, she put off her cloak and hat. In shadow as the mirror was, it yet enabled her to see her own white face and straightened hair and disordered frock. A woman's vanity, even in such an hour, gave the wish that Edmond might see her otherwise. But her thought of self was momentary; and when she had stood an instant, combating an agitation which threatened to unnerve her utterly, she opened the door and entered the room.

He was standing with his back to the table, listening earnestly to Gatelet, who told him the story of the night. He had not heard her knock, for the narrative absorbed him entirely, and when she entered all unexpectedly an exclamation burst from his lips, and he stood regarding her awkwardly. She had thought that he would hold out his arms to her, or give her some warm word of welcome even before another; but no word was uttered, nor did he make any movement. She, in turn, was as one struck dumb. The lights danced

before her eyes. She tried to utter his name, but her lips would not help her.

Lefort was the first to speak. There was no anger in his voice, but rather the tone of one who must pronounce some judicial and impartial sentence. She knew, when she heard him, that no event of the past week remained to be told.

“I am glad that you have come, Beatrix,” he said; “the Captain has been telling me about to-night, and it is right that you should hear him. All this is news to me, and I wait until you speak. Of course, you must have much to say to us?”

He paused, regarding her curiously. She stood against the wall, a wan and desolate figure facing her accuser — for this she knew that Gatelet was.

“If this man has spoken, he has told you that our friend is dead,” she exclaimed angrily. “I went to the Rue de l’Arc-en-Ciel to-night, but could not save him. He died in the tavern there because I did not wish to be Monsieur Gatelet’s friend. Is not that your news, Monsieur?”

A new courage, born of the danger, came to her as she confronted them. Impossible for her to realise that her husband had ceased to be her lover. She had only to speak, she thought.

290 The Garden of Swords

Gatelet, in his turn, was quick to pursue an advantage of her words.

“Madame,” he said, “I will leave you to explain everything to your husband. He will judge of the rest by what you have just told us. The spy did not die in the city to-night, Madame, because you and your confederates were before us in the house. If I wished you to be my friend, it was to save your husband’s name from disgrace. It will be for him to say to-morrow, if not to-night, whether I have done my duty or have failed in it.”

He bowed curtly to them both and left the house. They heard the door shut and still were silent. The news of Brandon’s escape dumfounded her. She could not believe that Edmond, her lover, stood before her, silent, stern, un pitying. The desire to put her arms about his neck and to be held in his embrace and there to tell her story was such a desire as might well have broken down all her pride and cast her prostrate at his feet. But some chain of her destiny held her back. He had listened to the slander—he, the man she had loved with all her heart and soul. She set her heart against any thought of love when he began to speak again.

“Beatrix,” he exclaimed, when minutes of angry silence had elapsed, “I have signed away

my honour to return to you to-night. God help me if these things I hear are true. Let us have no misunderstanding. They say that you left Wörth with Brandon North. Is that a lie?"

"It is no lie. I left there with our friend — with your friend. They burned our house, and there was no one in Wörth to help me. Brandon found an Englishman who drove me to Strasburg. Was that a crime against your honour?"

She spoke in a voice grown hard and satirical. He bit his lips and pursued the question.

"There can be no friendship in war," he said quietly; "this man has chosen to be the enemy of France. He is, therefore, my enemy, and should have been yours. Admitting that danger led you to forget these things — and I see the possibility of that — how came it that you met him in Strasburg and went to his house there?"

"I went that he might carry my letter to you. I knew that he had come here out of pure friendship to me. There was no news of you except the news that he brought into Strasburg. Cannot you understand that, Edmond? When he was wounded, my honour and gratitude compelled me to befriend him. Would you have done less, had you been here? You know that you would not —"

"We are not discussing my actions but your

292 The Garden of Swords

own, Beatrix. If I had gone to a woman's house, a Frenchwoman's, under such circumstances as you went to the house of Brandon North, I should have known beforehand what you would think of me. Do you not see that you have dishonoured me in the eyes of every man who hears of these things? And are you child enough to believe that the Englishman came to Strasburg simply with the desire to serve you? My God, Beatrix, are you child enough to believe that?"

She looked up at him defiantly.

"Brandon is an Englishman," she said. "He does not lie as your friends lie. I know that he came here to serve me. I am glad that my friends saved him to-night. If your love of me is such a little thing that every word of slander can influence it, believe what you will. I have told you my story. Do not think that I shall appeal to you to accept it, Edmond."

He began to walk up and down the room restlessly. In the intervals of silence the thunder of the German cannon could be heard as a dreadful tocsin of the night. The old house quivered at every savage discharge.

"Your friend is an Englishman," he said, deliberating his words. "Your heart was never in France nor for me, Beatrix. From the first day you spoke of England and not of my country.

The army I serve has meant nothing to you. My honour was in your keeping, and you sold it to this man — because he was your fellow countryman. If it had been otherwise, you would have died in our home at Wörth before a German bivouac should have protected you. I cannot conceal these things from myself. God knows it was for love of you, to hear your voice again, that I gave my word and came back to this house ashamed to show my face to men. You have rewarded me by harbouring the enemies of France and saving them from justice. I can never forgive that, Beatrix. There must be no more talk of love between us. We have both made a mistake — let it begin and end with that, and God help me to deal with the man who has made my home desolate.”

She answered him with a little nervous laugh, which the intense emotion of the moment provoked. Nor was there wanting a certain contempt for his threat.

“Your home is desolate if you choose to make it so,” she said, looking him full in the face. “The folly will be yours. As for your honour, I am sorry you value it so lightly. Does honour betray a friend because he is wounded and helpless? Oh, you will deal with Brandon very easily — his foot is crushed, and he cannot stand. It was

294 The Garden of Swords

crushed because he wished to bring me news of you, Edmond."

"As he has told you. And you are simple enough to believe it? He, a German soldier, comes into Strasburg to help me, a French hussar. It is a story for a fairy book. I do not read books like that. I tell myself that when a man risks his life to see a woman, she is not as other women to him. A true wife would not have spoken to such a man. You have seen him every day; you have been to his rooms; you have helped him to-night to get back to the German lines and to tell them that Strasburg is at death's door, a burning city, a city which can no longer help France. Is that the work that my wife should do? God help me — my wife!"

He stood before her, white now with anger, as thus he weighed the evidence and seemed to judge her story for himself. She did not utter any word nor seek to defend herself. If he, Edmond, her lover, could believe that, then, indeed, would she be for ever silent. But he continued relentlessly:

"You love this man; why do you deny it?"

A cry which was half a moan came to her lips.

"Oh, my God — my God!"

"But I shall kill him, Beatrix. My honour can wait for that. He is in the city still. No

other now shall pay that debt. It is mine — you hear, mine. All your acting will not save him. And I shall see you suffer as I must suffer, because I thought you were the best — the truest woman in France!”

Her face was tearless when she lifted it to answer him.

“I am glad that you do not think so now,” she said.

He ground his heel into the carpet, for all his self-control had gone, and an empty vanity compelled him more and more to think of the shame which would fall upon him personally when the story of these things was known.

“Your confession is unnecessary,” he exclaimed. “I was a fool to ask you to explain. Your father left your mother because she was a Frenchwoman; you have betrayed my country because I am a Frenchman. It is useless to lie to me. You are judged out of your own mouth. My country means nothing to you. The sufferings of my country give you pleasure. You are the friend of those who have brought this suffering upon us. I do not want to hear more. Henceforth I will forget your name — I will forget, when this man is dead, that you ever came to Strasburg to dishonour me in the eyes of those who have loved me. You shall hear my name no more —

296 The Garden of Swords

never again, as God is my witness, will I enter the house which shelters you. Do not seek to turn from that; do not seek to find me out. The past is irrevocable; I will begin a new page, and your name shall not be written upon it. If they say of me, 'He was a coward,' they shall say it no more when your lover is dead. Do not make any mistake, Beatrix. I will not sleep until I have found him out. I will watch his house night and day until he has answered with the only answer a liar can give—his life. That is my farewell to you—oh, my God, that I should be here in Strasburg to utter it!"

He paused suddenly and looked at her. She stood white-faced and mute against the wall by the door. Her eyes were as stars in the dim light. Her hands were locked together, and she tapped the boards nervously with her little foot. And she was still standing so when he left the room and passed out to the darkness of the terrible city.

But at dawn Guillaumette found her senseless upon the floor, and hours passed before it was known whether she were alive or dead.



“She stood white-faced and mute against the wall.”

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CHAPTER XXVIII

“ IF STRASBURG FALLS ”

THERE followed upon her illness a week of dreams, which were the delirium of a brain overwrought, and of the burden she had carried for so many days. She knew not where she was or whose were the voices which spoke to her, but seemed to be living in a world apart — in a dreadful valley of shadows and of constant turmoil. Faces came to her fitfully in her dreams, the faces she had known in childhood — her mother's face and the face of Edmond bending over her while she slept. To him she stretched out her arms, but could not touch his hand before the vision passed. No finality even of the dream was permitted to that burning brain. As in a whirlpool of the mind she was tossed hither and thither in thought; now battling with the flames, which gave a golden radiance to the city of doom; now living through the night of Wörth again; now at her husband's feet imploring him, for love of her, to save the life of their friend. A thousand voices spoke to her, but she could recognize none of them. She did not know that Strasburg, minute by minute,

298 The Garden of Swords

crumbled to the dust. Sleep gave her nought but this prompting to labour unceasing of the mind, to this unending battle of the flame and smoke and faces of her visions.

Reason came back to her at last ; but ten days had passed, and she was in the Place Kleber no longer. When she opened her heavy eyes and sought to raise herself upon her bed, she saw that they had carried her to a strange house and laid her in a strange room. So bare and gloomy and vault-like was that chamber that she might well have been in the tombs. Even the pillars which carried the arches of the vaulted ceiling suggested an abiding place of the dead. The candles burning at her bedside were as watch-lights to her eyes. She heard no sound of any voice, but only the thunder of the cannon rolling distantly over the city above. Her weakness was beyond expression. She could not lift a hand from the coverlet of the bed. She thought that she was dying, and the rest of death seemed to come upon her as the sweetest gift of God.

Guillaumette came into the room presently walking upon tiptoe and carrying a basin of soup in her hand. When she saw that her mistress was awake, she set down the bowl quickly, and ran from the room crying, "Monsieur, Monsieur !" The cry brought the aged Abbé Colot

to the place, and he entered in haste, uttering, as he did so, a prayer of thanks that his little patient lived.

“ Ah! my child; you are awake, then. Glory be to God for this hour.”

Beatrix pressed her hands to her eyes.

“ Whose house is this ? ” she asked.

“ It is my house — you have been very ill here. They brought you to me from the Place Kleber. Ah, *mon enfant*, there is no more Place Kleber — no more Strasburg. We live in the vaults; we do not see the sun. You are very weak, Madame.”

She sighed, and laid her pretty head upon the pillow.

“ If I only could remember, Monsieur! ” she said. “ I have seen so many things. It is all night — night.”

“ But it will be day soon, my child.”

Guillaumette chimed in with her word.

“ And here is the beautiful soup, Madame. Oh! Madame, what soup it is. And nothing soon to eat but the fat geese’s livers and the horses’ bones. I do not love the geese — not at all, Madame. And you have been so ill, so ill. Every day I said, ‘ She will die to-day.’ Was it not so, Monsieur? Is she not to drink the beautiful soup? ”

300 The Garden of Swords

A poor wan smile crossed the pale face as Beatrix listened to the odd confession. Her awakened mind was busy already at the point where its chord of right reason had snapped.

“Has my husband been here?” she asked them suddenly.

The abbé shook his head. He had not heard of Lefort’s return, and he set down her question to the delirium which had left her.

“He is not in Strasburg, surely, my child. He will come presently. Your friends do not forget you. Monsieur Watts is here twice a day. He was here this morning; he will come again to-night.”

She listened to him as to one who spoke of strange things. Her weakened brain sought to grapple with the threads. Why did Richard Watts come there? Why had Edmond not been to the house? Ah, she remembered. That dreadful night of farewell—the threat, almost the curse upon her.

“Has Mr. Watts left any message for me?” was her next question.

“That you are to get well, my child. That is the message of us all. We cannot lose Madame Hélène’s daughter; we are not going to lose her. And she must not talk. That is the doctor’s command. Silence, silence, until the little head is well again.”

“If Strasburg Falls” 301

“And the beautiful soup! Ah! Monsieur forgets the beautiful soup. We can live in the cellars, Madame, when we have *the* soup like that. It is I who made it—I, Guillaumette. Will you not taste it, Madame—just for Guillaumette’s sake?”

She held her mistress in her arms and began to feed her as a little child. The abbé watched approvingly. He did not know why her husband had not been to the house. The Captain’s duty as a soldier had kept him from the city, he thought. And so he spoke of Strasburg’s sufferings in a low and gentle voice soothing as a lullaby.

“Ah, we should give thanks to God that we have even the cellars of our house, my child. There are others who have not straw to cover them. But we have taught France her duty, and France will remember. The brave General, I do not know how to find words to speak of him. Day and night, day and night he refuses to listen to the cowards. We are a city of fire and dust, and yet we remain a city. We have little food to eat, yet God feeds our hearts. And we shall resist until the end, though there be not one stone upon another. Yesterday, they tell me, six hundred shells fell upon bastion eleven. Six hundred shells! Think of it! These Germans are devils—the house of God even is not sacred to them.

302 The Garden of Swords

But they are facing a brave people, my child. We know how to suffer. Even the women do not complain. Ah! God be thanked for the brave women who give us their prayers to-day."

Beatrix seemed to listen to him, but found no interest in his words. She was glad when he left her to sleep again, but no sleep rewarded her busy brain. Line by line her own story came back to her. She was alone, then! Edmond had left her forever. She would never know his kiss again. He deemed her unfaithful to his country. The punishment of her folly seemed bitter beyond words. She felt as some outcast, lacking country, friends, and knowing not so much as one in all the world who would speak a word of love to her.

Guillaumette watched at her bedside that afternoon and told her many things in fragments of reluctant gossip. She had been very ill after "Monsieur" left the house. Few buildings remained unharmed in the Place Kleber. In the northern suburbs of the city the people lived in their cellars. This room was one of the old vaults under the presbytery of the abbé's church in the Rue Nationale. Richard Watts had come to their house when she was ill, and had insisted upon her removal. The abbé, who slept in the sacristy of his church, and had loved "Madame"

as one of his own children, could not do enough for her. There were many in Strasburg to condole with Madame Hélène's daughter even at such a time. General Uhrich himself had called at the house. No one knew anything of the story, except that she was very ill, and that the abbé had taken her there for safety. They had done all they could to make the place comfortable—but there was no choice. Upstairs the iron death was everywhere. Children had been killed at their mothers' breasts. The great library of Strasburg burned still, as some vast flambeau bidding the Germans to look upon the unyielding heart of the city. There was a party that wished to yield, but the General would not listen to it. Monsieur Watts said that the General was a madman who had been weaned on *pâté de foie gras*. The American, Dr. Forbes—ah, how clever he was! He would return at sunset, and bring Monsieur Watts with him. They came together always.

Beatrix heard the gossip greedily. Ten days had passed, then, since Edmond left her. She trembled to think what those ten days might have meant to Brandon. Richard Watts's anxiety to see her she could construe only as some desire that she should have news of her friend. Whether it were ill or good news she dare not ask. In one

304 The Garden of Swords

way a vague sense of relief succeeded the remembrance that Edmond knew her secret. She did not believe, in her gentler moods, that his love for her could not brook so womanly a folly as that of which he found her guilty. He would come to reason when he had reflected upon all that she had told him.

Richard Watts presented himself at the house at five o'clock, and when they brought his message she asked eagerly that she might see him. It was good to look upon that burly figure; good to hear that cheery English voice congratulating her. And he had so much to tell her.

"And so the little passenger is getting well again. Bravo, bravo! I shall have rare news for old Anne Brown to-night. Eh, young lady, you will send your love to old Anne Brown?"

He had the little hand in his for a moment and pressed the burning fingers.

"You are kind to come," she said.

"Kind, young lady — why, hark to that. Your father's oldest friend kind to come and see that little Beatrix is getting well again. What nonsense!"

She thought upon his words.

"You knew my father, then?"

"Ay, better than them all; knew his heart, his very soul. Some day we will talk of it — not

“ If Strasburg Falls ” 305

now. You must get well again first, and have done with this nonsense about Master Brandon. Oh, don't be anxious about him. The rogue can walk again, almost as well as I can.”

A sigh of relief escaped her lips. She told him, as shortly as she might, the story of her husband's return. He listened with grave face, which could not cloak his anxiety.

“ I feared from the first that this would happen,” she said. “ Edmond would not believe. He chose to misunderstand me. He has not been here all these days. He threatened Brandon. It is a relief to know that they have not met.”

Watts feigned to laugh at the idea. His assumption of a confident indifference was none the less a failure.

“ Strasburg cannot hold out three days,” he said. “ It was lucky I went to the Rue de l'Arc-en-Ciel when I did. We bribed their own man and got over the roofs to Dr. Forbes's house. He has been attending you, you know — a right good fellow, though he was born in San Francisco. Brandon is in his house now — about the last place they would look for him. The American flag will protect him. When the city falls, men will be reasonable again, and all this will be forgotten. We must wish the city to open its

306 The Garden of Swords

gates, little passenger. That's the only chance for all of us. Meanwhile, trust me to keep those two fellows apart. I'll have no cut-throat business, if I can help it. What are they fighting about? Devil take the rogues if they know. And why is Dick Hamilton's daughter lying here like a pretty spoiled dove in a cage? Because two fools have been playing the fool's game together. But we shall stop that. Trust old Richard Watts and the Germans who make the music at the gates."

Thus he sought to give her courage, and fearing to excite her, he left her with an echo of his own self-reliance in her heart. She knew that she had one friend working for her; and when she slept that night her prayer was this — that the gates of Strasburg might be opened to the enemy.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LETTER

SHE slept heavily and without dreams. Exhausted nature drank at the well of sleep, and, thus refreshed, gave her new gifts of strength and thought when the dawn came. She had suffered from no malady but malady of the mind; and now that the crisis was past and all the long days of anxiety ended in this day of sure calamity, her mind came back to her and taught her to reason as she had not reasoned since the day of Wörth. Calmly, quietly she reckoned with her position. There were facts she would hide no longer from herself—the fact of her estrangement from France; of the pity she gave to the soldiers of France when pride of them should have been her impulse; of her affection for the country she had left and for the English friends she had made in Strasburg. That affection demanded no loosening of the bonds which bound her still in love to Edmond. She knew that her love was stronger than all else, just as it was independent of all else. She did not believe that the misfortunes of their lives were irreparable.

308 The Garden of Swords

Misfortune, indeed, should be to them the beginning of a new understanding and a truer comradeship. Edmond would have need of her when Strasburg fell. She would give of her pity a generous offering.

If thus she could reason calmly, none the less was her anxiety unceasing. The very doubt as to what was happening to those she thought of in that city of fire and terror aided her to a recovery of her bodily strength. She rose from her bed by the very desire to rise. The week that succeeded her recovery was a week of questions unceasing to those who visited her — the abbé, the American doctor, old Richard Watts. They evaded her questions or answered them to no purpose. Even old Watts could bring her no tidings to satisfy her.

“You are to get better, little passenger,” he said always. “The rest is my business. I shall see that two foolish fellows do not make fools of themselves any more. Tell yourself that, when you think about it, and do not worry. Say that old Richard Watts is more than a match for them. We cannot hold out much longer here, and when we open the gates common-sense will come in. We must n’t expect any common-sense while the Germans are sending a thousand shells a day as a pleasant token of their good intentions.

But it will come by-and-by, and then that rascal, Edmond, will be on his knees to you. If he does n't come of his own free will, I'll bring him here by the scruff of his neck. We'll laugh at his threats, and Brandon shall join in. Trust Brandon to keep his head if these French maniacs let him. He's at the American consulate now, and I don't suppose they're going to give him up. So you make your mind easy, little Beatrix. I'm your friend if you'll have me for that. God knows it's something to have the friendship of a little girl like you."

She thanked him from her heart.

"It is I who should be grateful," she exclaimed, holding out her hand to him; "as if I could ever forget the friend who saved my friend's life. And you see I'm well again already. I shall go out and hear about things for myself to-morrow."

"Indeed, and you will do nothing of the sort, young lady. Go out—the little passenger go out, when the shells fall like hail and there are dead at every corner. The idea of it!"

"But you have come out to see me?"

"Oh, I don't count. There's no one would miss old Dick Watts. If I smoke a few pipes more or less, it does n't matter much to anyone, you be sure."

310 The Garden of Swords

“It would matter to me.”

He squeezed her little hand in his great fist.

“Ah,” he said, “there’s news for old Anne Brown. The little passenger cares. And because she cares she won’t show her pretty face in Strasburg until the gates are open. I may say that, young lady.”

She turned away with a sigh.

“My husband does not come—how can I remain here?”

“He will come when the Germans enter. Pity is much to a man. He will need your pity, then. You will forgive, and he will forget the rest.”

She was silent a moment, and then she said very earnestly, “How I wish that the end was to-day!”

“As all sensible men wish it. To-day or to-morrow, what does it matter? We have done enough for an idea. The rest is a cheap love for heroics.”

She turned to him smiling.

“You will never love France,” she said.

“I love it with your love, young lady.”

She was silent, for she knew that this man read the truth which had haunted her now many a weary night and day. No longer was it possible to look upon herself as a French-

woman loyal to France in heart and thought. The defeat of France's army had changed her—perchance had driven her to that very pride in Saxon might which she deplored but could not modify. The belief was in itself an infidelity to the man who loved her. She tried to thrust it from her, but it returned every hour and would be heard. "You are an Englishwoman," the voice said. Her love of England was never so great as in that hour.

Richard Watts left her at six o'clock that night, and at seven the abbé returned from one of his daily visits to the hospital. He came in with many expressions of delight at the progress she was making, and, much to her surprise, had a letter for her in a handwriting she did not recognise.

"It will be from Monsieur, no doubt," the old man said, as he handed her the dainty missive. "These Germans allow their prisoners to write, they say. I would have believed no good of them if I had not carried the letter myself. You must tell us that he is well, Madame. Ah! if there could be roses on your cheeks when he comes home again!"

She did not contradict him, but opened her letter with trembling hands. There was no address upon the paper that she could see, nor

312 The Garden of Swords

was the letter signed. She read it with swimming eyes which scarce could decipher the wavering lines.

“At dawn to-morrow,” the letter said, “in the gardens of Laroche, the surgeon, your English friend will die.”

Beatrix read the letter twice, then crumpled it in her hand. The abbé, watching her curiously, saw the blood rush to her cheeks; but she did not gratify his curiosity. When he had waited a little while and knew that her silence was final, he bade her good-night and left the room.

An hour later Guillaumette ran into the darkened church, where he was praying for the stricken city, to tell him that her mistress had quitted the presbytery, and was gone she knew not whither.

“She has left us, Monsieur, she who is so ill. The good God help us! we shall never see my mistress again!”

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE HOUSE OF LAROCHE

BEATRIX had quitted the abbé's house, indeed; yet her purpose was not clear to her; nor did she know, as she crept up the stone stairs, and stood once more in the streets of the city, whither her distress should carry her, or to what end. She must prevent her husband committing this crime, she thought. She must save the men from themselves. God alone could help her to do that.

She was very weak of her illness still, and she shivered as she drew her cloak about her and stood gazing up at the wondrous world of stars above and at the gaunt shapes of the mediæval houses, which had leaned upon the abbé's church for three centuries, and yet could conjure up the romance and colour of forgotten ages. There had been rain all day; but the air of evening was sweet and fresh upon her face; and the very solitude about her gave a charm to the sense of freedom which was beyond all her experience. Not until she had walked a little way and stood where she could overlook the Place Kleber, and the ground where

314 The Garden of Swords

her home had been, did her mind recur to the dangers of the city, and to the stories which they had told her in the haven of the cellars. But, suddenly, out of the night the truth came. The northern quarters of Strasburg were no more. A terrible desert of rubble and ashes and fire confronted her. Distant buildings caught the quivering iridescence, and were incarnadined with the play of crimson light. Shells of houses vomited flame and smoke, and brilliant sparks burning brightly in the clear night air. An unceasing crash of artillery was the horrible music of the hour. She could see the golden paths of the destroyer as the trail of falling stars bearing a message of doom. The picture was grand beyond any her eyes had looked upon. She stood spell-bound, unconscious of her peril.

Save for such troopers as were seeking to quell the fires, she saw no one in the streets through which her journey carried her. By here and there, a light shone in a cellar, and she could hear the voices of those who lived there. A priest passed her at the New Church, carrying the Host to the dying. He turned curious eyes upon her as she knelt, but did not speak to her. A little way farther on a group of men with lanterns were about a great waggon, which a shell had struck and shattered; the blood of the dead horses still flowed

fresh in the gutters. She sought to pass unobserved; but as she drew near a terrible report deafened her, and the whole street was illumined by a blinding flash of light. She heard the shouts of the men as they ran to safety. There was the thunder of falling masonry, a choking cloud of dust hiding the stars — then darkness intolerable. She stood alone in the street, and when she could see the way, she ran on again — she knew not whither.

She must save her husband — must save Brandon. That was her watchword always. Those who had befriended her must not commit this crime. She had guessed that the malignity of Gatelet dictated the letter which she had received. She would defeat that malignity. There were moments when she thought of going to Richard Watts again; but reflection seemed to say that hers must be the voice to save Edmond and her friend. She did not know how it was that her footsteps carried her unconsciously to the Rue de Kehl; but thither she went, and anon found herself before the house of the American Consul. Brandon was there, in that house. She determined, cost what it might, that she would hear the truth from his own lips.

Many minutes passed before she could find courage to pull the great brass handle, and when she did so the sonorous echoes of the bell frightened her. But the man who opened the

316 The Garden of Swords

door, after he had spoken a few words to her, admitted that she could see Mr. North. A moment later Brandon himself—the old Brandon—with his quiet, calm voice, was reasoning with her as he would have reasoned with a child.

“Beatrix,” he said gently, “could you not have trusted me?”

“You do not know what I have suffered, Brandon,” she exclaimed; “and this—my God! tell me that it is not true?”

He made a little gesture of indifference.

“No harm will come to Edmond. I swear it on my honour. He has acted with little sense—but that is the habit of the French soldier. He is a good man at heart, and will love you none the less when this is over—”

“Promise me,” she exclaimed desperately, “you will not go to Laroche’s house to-morrow.”

“If I go, it will not be to make a fool of myself.”

“But he will kill you.”

“I must trust to the help of a befriending Providence. There will be some way out, and I shall find it. He must listen to me. He is listening to our friend Watts at this moment. Possibly there will be a method which does not occur to either of us at this moment. In any case, no harm will come to him.”

“But you—how can I leave you to the alter-

native? Oh, my God, if he should kill you, Brandon!"

He started and looked at her closely. She did not know that such words were sweeter than life to him. His voice was colder and discouraging when next he spoke.

"It will not come to that," he said. "One man with a sword in his hand does not fight another with a medicine bottle. I am still half an invalid. Besides, is there no hope of common-sense?"

She buried her face in her hands, and the tears trickled through her fingers. The sacrifice which this man contemplated was not to be hidden from her. He would give his life that her husband might live.

"You shall not go," she exclaimed earnestly. "Brandon, have I no right of our friendship? You will not meet my husband to-morrow."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Would you have them say that the Englishman is a coward, Beatrix?"

The answer frightened her. The culminating hour of her suffering was there in that room. Her tears, falling fast upon her white face, seemed to burn Brandon's fingers. He would have given his life to bring laughter to those eyes he loved.

"Let us be sensible," he continued, with a

318 The Garden of Swords

great effort to control himself. "What can I do? What other course is there? If your husband will make it a question of my honour, am I to let that, the honour of an Englishman, be the sport of every fool in Strasburg? Of course, I must go. The rest is in God's hands. I shall do my best for your sake and my own."

He could give her no other answer. She might take from the house nothing but this truth, that the destiny of him for whom she would have made the ultimate sacrifice was in God's keeping.

"I shall never forget, Brandon — never to my life's end," she said as she left him.

"I trust there will be nothing to remember, Beatrix. You are the brave one to come through the city at such a time; you must go back at once. I ought to send one of our fellows with you, but under the circumstances I suppose it's best not. Perhaps Watts will bring good news before morning. If you are going to his house now, you will hear what he has to say and might let me know. I can't believe that your husband is serious — it would be too grotesque."

She did not answer him, but at the door she stooped suddenly and kissed his hand.

It was ten o'clock when she left the house and stood again in the silent street, whose roof was of

golden fire mingling with the stars, and the radiance of the mirrored flames on many a spire and many a dome. Nothing now, either of the scene or of her own peril, mattered to her. The jibes of besotted gunners, the warnings of officers who passed by to the citadel, the deafening roar of guns, even the dead in the streets—she went on heedless of these things. Brandon was to give his life for her lover's. He would die at dawn, because he had been her friend. Well she knew that Edmond would not heed the words which could be spoken. That birthright of fallacy, which made of honour a god, was far above logic or reason. He would kill Brandon for honour's sake.

This intolerable thought of one man's sacrifice for another man's folly was the culminating distress of that strange hour. While she told herself again and again that such a sacrifice must never be, the futility of her resolutions appeared in a clearer light with every step she took. The gulf between Edmond and herself was never to be bridged again. She knew that she could neither hope nor believe in France as she had hoped and believed on the day when her destiny sent her to the Niederwald. One by one these events recurred to her imagination—the occasion of their picnic, the call to arms, the dreadful day of battle, the weakening of the cords of faith, the lost glory of

320 The Garden of Swords

the army which was to protect the children of France. How few were the weeks since she had regarded her lover as one sent to her unmistakably to be that link in the chain of her love which death alone might break. And now! Doubt, suspicion, separation, above all, the contemplation of this crime, were her fruits of war. She saw that they were fruits surpassing all agony of death and battle, and even the pity of the children's grief.

Until this time, and the hour was now eleven, there had been no thought in her mind of making such an appeal to her husband as she had made to Brandon. Her common-sense told her that her own concern for the life of her English friend would be a new provocation to the crime. Edmond would rejoice in her distress. It would prompt him to find a better excuse, a new insult to his honour. Turn where she would, she could see no way. Often there came to her lips the prayer that the gates of Strasburg might be opened to the enemy before the sun should shine again upon that scene of desolation and of death. Defeat, the shame of France, alone could turn the peril from her doors. She knew well that the end could not be distant; that whatever heroism the brave Urich still might contemplate could but postpone the inevitable hour when the white flag must fly from the

citadel, and the roar of the guns be heard no more. Perchance the superb heroism, the unbroken courage, the splendid faith of Strasburg would, under other circumstances, have won back that allegiance to France of which war had robbed her. But the thought of to-morrow ever prevailed above such a hope as that. Brandon would die at dawn. He would pay the penalty of his friendship for her.

She could pray, in truth, that the gates of Strasburg might be opened, but there was no message of the night to answer her prayer. Everywhere now the people sought the fitful sleep which the cellars and the caverns of the city might give them. Those that were abroad battled anew with the raging fire and the smoking *débris*. She seemed to be imprisoned in some Inferno, where the air was hot and stifling, and the voices were the moaning shells and the crash of the great guns and the thunder of houses falling, or of the fire's new victory. Nothing affrighted her; she passed in and out to the dangerous places; among the groups of blackened *pompiers*; through companies of artillerymen; by scenes of death and agony; yet was not witness of the men or of their work. If Strasburg would surrender! If the end would come! If she could save Brandon! Never had she known such suffering of suspense, never such a burden of excitement and of fear. The night was as a year of terror

322 The Garden of Swords

enduring. She prayed to God that she might not live until day dawned.

It was after midnight then, and she knew that she had been walking aimlessly, without destination or desire of rest, for two hours. A sudden faintness, the due of her illness, warned her at last that she must seek some asylum and abandon a quest so futile. For a little while, she rested upon a bench at the door of a deserted café; but when her strength came back to her, she remembered the promise which old Richard Watts had made, and once more she returned to his house. He met her at the door. His grave face betrayed the tidings of which he was the bearer.

“I have been expecting you for the last hour, child,” he said as he led her into his English room; “they have told you, of course —”

“They have told me — yes,” she answered almost in a whisper.

“Are you going to your husband?”

“Why should I go?”

“Because he has need of you.”

She started back with a cry of terror.

“Oh, my God!” she cried, “what is it — what do you hide from me?”

“I hide nothing. It is best that you should know. I thought that you did know when you came here. Your husband was struck by a frag-

In the House of Laroche 323

ment of a shell in the Broglie to-night, and is now lying in the house of Laroche, the surgeon."

For an instant she stood with eyes wide open and hands trembling upon her breast.

"Take me to Edmond," she said.

CHAPTER XXXI

“THERE IS NIGHT IN THE HILLS”

It seemed that Strasburg could suffer no more; and yet she continued unyieldingly to suffer. Hours became days, and days weeks, and still no white flag floated over her citadel; nor were the voices of her brave men silent. Down below in the cellars the timid wailed and cried for light and bread. Mighty lanterns, the shells of her great buildings, gave to the night the crimson beacons which seemed dyed with the very blood of the dead. Faint hearts told each other that the Hôtel de Ville, the theatre, the New Church, the Governor's house, the Library, were but ashes upon barren wastes. Two thousand dead the city mourned; and yet, mourning them, prepared to die. The ultimate woe of despair was upon a helpless people. Their homes crumbled to the very dust. The open grave became their offering to France and the children of France.

It had been upon the nineteenth day of September that Edmond Lefort fell wounded by the fragment of a shell at the very door of the surgeon Laroche's house in the Broglie. He lay in the same house upon the morning of the twenty-

“There is Night in the Hills” 325

seventh; and those about him knew that he was dying. Since the grey light of dawn winged into that room of death and shone upon the haggard face, swathed still in its bloody bandages, his little wife had not moved from his bedside nor released his hot fingers from her own. She sat there as some angel of sleep comforting him. The tragedy of the weeks bygone, the hope, the fear of them had vanished as the mists of an autumn night. No other name, no other voice, no other scene stood between her and her lover now. Clinging as to some supreme faith in the God who had given her love, she could not believe that the supreme calamity was at hand. Edmond was dying, they said. She would not hear them.

He lay upon a soldier's bed, a curtain shielding his eyes, one white hand clasping the hot fingers which had never left his own; the other stroking the coverlet as men, sick unto death, will in the last hours that life may give them. Once only since fate struck him down had he opened his eyes to the sunlight, or recognised who it was that stood with him at the end; but that instant of recognition was never to be forgotten. Beatrix remembered, through the years, the voice that uttered her name then in a transport of pity and love. What a light of joy was on his face! Again and again he whispered the beloved name

326 The Garden of Swords

as she covered his hands and face with kisses which were the gift of her very heart. No other came between them then. The angel of death had linked their souls, to be forever thus through the infinite ages of their being.

She knew that he was dying, though she sought to hide the truth from herself. The stertorous breathing, the pallor of the face, the burning hands, the cold sweat of night upon his forehead, the agony even of the conscious moments, were there perpetually to warn her of that instant when the heart would beat no more, and the day of suffering draw to its end. But the flame of her hope was not to be quenched. She reeled before the power of death, and yet would not admit that power. The God who had sent her to Wörth to know the whole blessedness and sweetness of a young girl's love would not, could not take this love from her. She clung to her husband with an intensity born of frenzy and despair. She longed to lift him from the bed, and to say, "Arise and live." She prayed, as she had never prayed before, that he might be given back to her. Through that long September day, that day when Strasburg at last was to cry for the mercy it had not wished, she never stirred from his bed, nor ceased to listen for the words that should be to her precious beyond all the words their love had spoken.

“There is Night in the Hills” 327

There had been a cessation of the cannon early in the afternoon, but she knew nothing of the reasons which brought the unaccustomed silence and filled the streets again with those who had almost forgotten the sun and the life of day. In the darkened room she heard her lover talking, now of Wörth, now of their happy days in the Niederwald; again of the battle and of the death ride there. Once, indeed, he raised himself upon his elbow and seemed to call for his comrades; but the next moment he had fallen back with a froth of blood upon his lips. An anger against the destiny which thus could make him suffer closed her lips and dried her eyes. She would save him — she would close the open grave; they should not take him from her. In her distress she even withdrew her hand from his, and he opened his eyes once more and began to speak to her.

“Beatrix — it is you, little Beatrix.”

“It is I, dearest husband.”

“You have forgiven me, my wife — ah, God, how precious! — you have forgiven me that I made you suffer?”

She knelt at his bedside, and burying her face upon the outstretched arm she made anew the child-wife’s vow that he had heard in the golden days of old time.

“I love you — Edmond — I love you — I love you.”

328 The Garden of Swords

The white hand rested upon her hair; the eyes of the man were looking over the city he had loved.

“There is nothing in the world but love, Beatrix,” he said, speaking in a voice so low that her ears must almost touch his lips; “all else that we live for, fame, glory, ourselves, money — they are nothing. If I had remembered my love for you, little wife — if I had remembered —”

He began to breathe with dreadful rapidity. She could feel his heart throbbing beneath her cheeks.

“Dearest,” she said, “let us remember nothing but the days to come. Oh, I will love you always, always — I have none but you, Edmond.”

He sought to kiss her lips, but could not raise his head from the pillow.

“I do not fear death,” he said very slowly, “if one might sleep upon the field with a cloak about the face and a sword in the hand. The grave is all dark. You will not let them lay me in the grave, Beatrix.”

“Oh, Edmond — oh, for God’s sake — how can I bear it?”

“You will come to me, little wife. I shall hear your voice in the loneliness of death. For that we love and are loved. Not to be alone through the eternal night! Ah, if you will re-

“There is Night in the Hills” 329

member then, beloved, when there is none to hear and my eyes are blinded! Ah, if you will come to me in that sleep! I have no right to ask. All that I would live for is here in my arms. They shall not take you from me, Beatrix—if you forgive!”

A great silence, broken only by the voice of tears, reigned in that abode of death. Without, in the awakened streets, great throngs flocked to the cathedral and the citadel. The white flag floated above the city. The agony of Strasburg was no more. To the dying man, the silent cannon sent the last message of life.

“Beatrix,” he said, “you will go to England with Richard Watts. I wish it. Remember that I have loved you, little one. Think well of my country. Think well of France. If our child should live, tell him of Wörth. If my son—ah, God! why do I speak of him?”

He fell back exhausted and closed his eyes. For many minutes no word was spoken. When he uttered her name again, she knew that it was for the last time.

“There is night in the hills,” he said; “give me light, oh God, that I may see her face again.”

THE END

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10

175

